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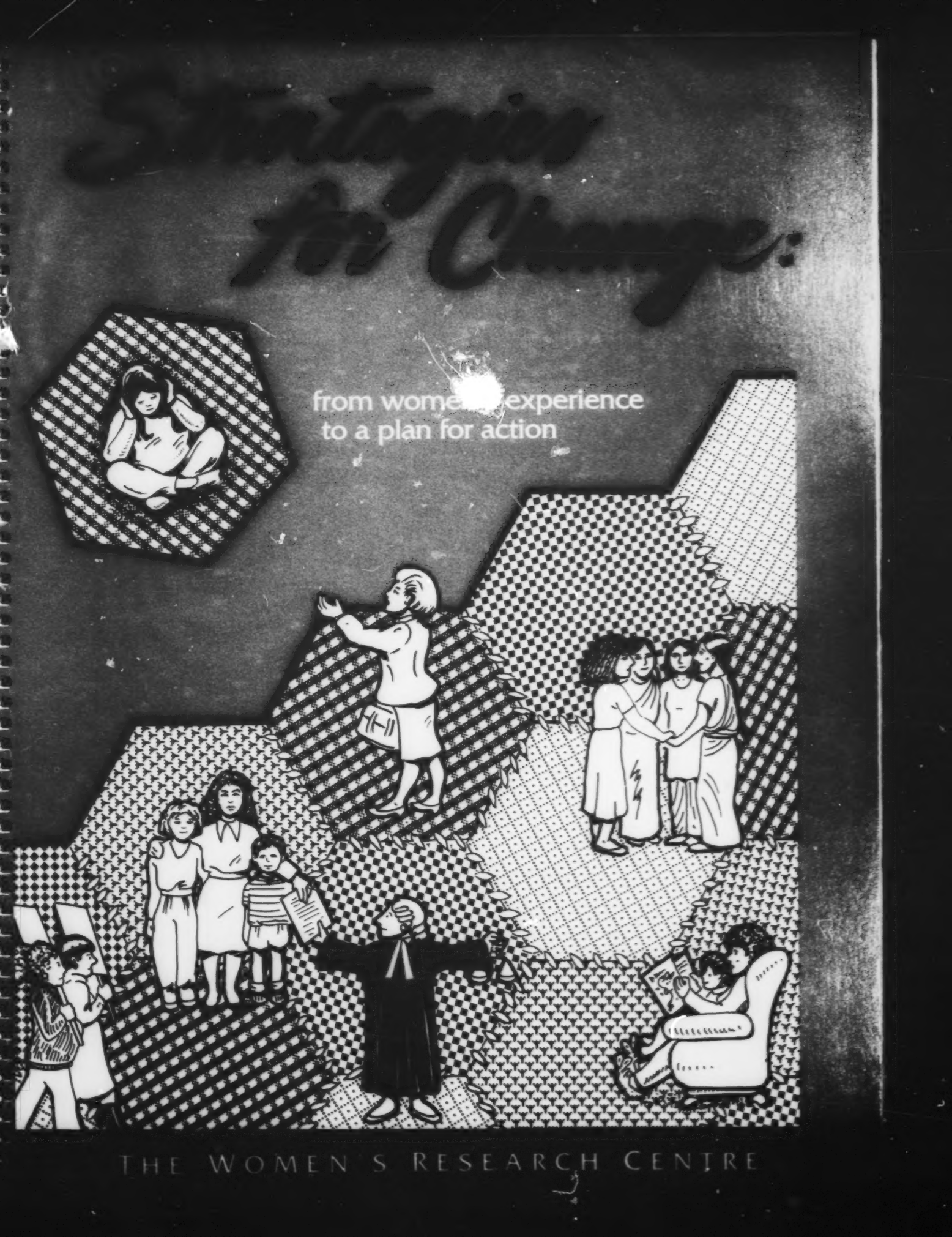
Strategies for Change:

from women's experience
to a plan for action



THE WOMEN'S RESEARCH CENTRE

Strategies for Change:

from women's experience to a plan for action

DEBRA J. LEWIS
WITH JAN BARNSLEY

PROJECT COMMITTEE

- Marcy Cohen
- Carol Rosset
- Debra Lewis
- Jan Barnsley

THE WOMEN'S RESEARCH CENTRE · 1990

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• Strategies for Change Project Committee •

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Jan Barnsley
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IF...

- you see a problem for women in your community and you want to do something about it
- your women's group wants to plan a campaign around an issue but you don't quite know where to start
- you are frustrated that so many women's issues seem to get co-opted and misrepresented
- your group often suffers from burn-out and you want to focus your actions more effectively
- you see that many organizing campaigns don't speak to the experience of women in your community
- you want to work more effectively for change

...THEN THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU!

•

INTRODUCTION

Looking back over the past two decades of the women's movement, it is clear that women's groups have had a real impact on the political, social and cultural face of Canada. Through the work of women's groups, many issues that were unheard of are now visible. Wife assault and rape, poverty and the wage gap, childcare and abortion, have all been placed on society's agenda.

In some cases, governments have responded with legislative and policy changes. Women have organized feminist services to meet the needs of the women most drastically affected by these issues. Trade union women have pushed their unions to take women's needs more seriously. At the same time, however, the reality of life for many women has changed very little.

Despite legislative and policy changes at different levels of government, women still face violence, economic discrimination and a lack of reproductive control. Feminist services are underfunded. Unions have responded to women's demands with varying levels of support. Our work for change is as necessary as ever.

Whenever we work for change, we use a strategy—whether that strategy is consciously thought out or not. Our choices about strategy make a great difference to the kind of change we get. A good strategy is built on women's experience. If the strategy is successful it will make a real difference in women's lives.

A strategy that is poorly thought through may lead to change that is, at best, inadequate. More insidiously, it may lead to the appearance of change while women experience no concrete results.

Strategies for Change: from women's experience to a plan for action is intended to assist women's groups in deciding what strategy to use when working on a particular issue. It is based on the assumption that **how** we work for change on an issue is as important as raising the issue itself. While a great deal has been written about the many issues women face, too little attention is paid to the process of strategy development—deciding what will make a real difference for women and how we go about getting it.

We can learn from our past experience as a movement, as well as from the experience of particular women's groups. We can also draw on our own knowledge of what women's lives are like and, consequently, what women most need.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK

This book is divided into two parts.

PART ONE: the Story of Three Issues looks at wage discrimination, wife assault and custody law.

We give a brief history of how each issue developed. We consider how the issue can best be defined from women's point of view. For each issue, we present a case study of a group which has actively worked on the issue.

Each case study consists of a roundtable: women from the group sat down with the writers and discussed their experiences in depth.

In the roundtables, we look at the lessons that can be learned through their experience. Finally, we consider some of the pitfalls and offer suggestions for future work.

PART TWO: Four Steps to a Strategy for Change offers a framework for women's groups to use in initiating strategy discussions around issues.

We outline key questions that groups can answer in the four steps of strategy development:

- grounding the issue
- defining the issue
- developing the strategy
- preparing for the results.

Planning a strategy is not difficult. It's really just a process of asking the right questions and building on the answers. This booklet suggests what questions you should consider, and how you can build on your answers.

We also offer some "how-to's" for facilitating the discussion. This booklet is based upon the experience of the women's groups that we present in the roundtables and upon our own experience in strategy development. You can put this together with your own experience to develop an action plan that can bring real change for women.

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Part One:

THE STORY OF THREE ISSUES

At a Glance... WAGE DISCRIMINATION

1. MEN'S WORK, WOMEN'S WORK

Historically, Canada developed a highly segregated workforce in which "women's work" was paid substantially less than men's. A woman economist in the early part of this century identified four rationales for women's low wages. The first was lack of trades organization. The other reasons were: women worked for pocket money or extra income; women had a lower standard of comfort than men; and women's wages only needed to cover their individual maintenance. In short, women don't need or deserve as much money as men. Men, on the other hand, were seen as needing enough money to support their families.

2. THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

"Equal pay for work of equal value" first appeared in international documents in 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles. Convention 100 of the International Labour Organization was an important statement of "equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value."

Although Canada abstained from the vote on Convention 100, it was passed by the ILO in 1951. Canada did not ratify the Convention until 1972.

3. EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

In the 1950s, the federal government and the provinces responded to women's demands for better wages by passing laws that called for equal pay for equal work done in the same workplace. But "equal pay for equal work" means little to women, since we rarely do the same work as men. In spite of some adjustments in language in the 1960s and early 1970s (for example, equal pay for "similar or substantially similar work"), these laws did not deal with differences in pay caused by the segregation of women's work.

4. A RENEWED PUSH

With the rebirth of the women's movement, women stepped up the campaign for an end to wage discrimination. Echoing what many women already knew, in 1970 the Royal Commission on the Status of Women pointed out the inadequacy of existing equal pay laws. Although its statements now appear rather weak and cautious, the Commission did publicly expose some of the economic hardships facing women.

5. EQUAL VALUE IN CANADA AND QUEBEC

In Quebec, feminist demands led to the inclusion of equal pay for work of equal value in the 1975 provincial Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Under pressure from the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, the federal government also included equal value in the 1977 Canadian Human Rights Act.

Both are complaints-based models. That means the responsibility rests with individual workers to identify discrimination and file a complaint. Few complaints have been made, and even fewer have been successful.

6. UNIONS RESPOND

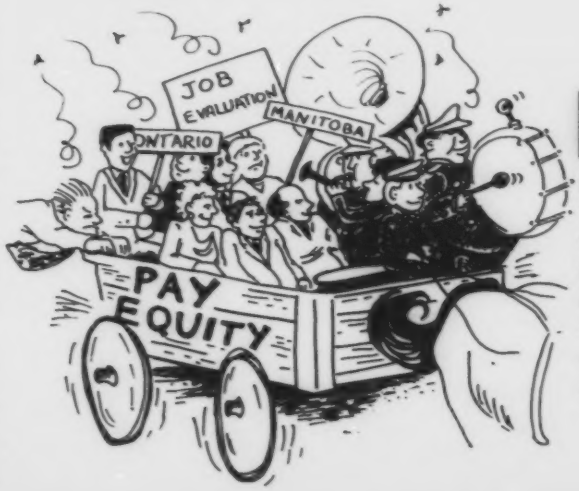
In the 1970s and 1980s, trade unions increasingly responded to the equal pay issue. Some union tactics have been indirect. They have focused on the needs of low paid workers as a group. Such strategies have included negotiating minimum rates for all employees and flat dollar increases rather than percentage increases for their members. Because most low paid workers are women, these strategies have contributed to the equal pay fight.

Other unions have attacked the equal pay issue more directly. For example, some public sector unions have tried to negotiate equal base rates for inside (mostly women) and outside (mostly men) workers. While women still face barriers within the trade union movement, unionized women are the ones who have gained the most in the battle for equal pay.

7. PAY EQUITY - AN EASY SELL?

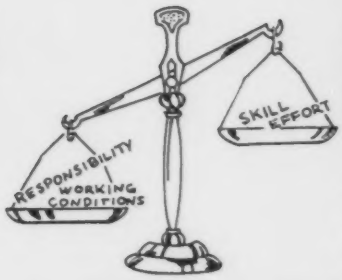
In the mid-1980s, the terms "pay equity" and "employment equity" were increasingly used. Some women are concerned that these new terms could mean a watering down of "equal pay for work of equal value" and "affirmative action." Others like the terms because they give the impression of fairness and are easier to sell to politicians and the public.

It is clear that the words mean different things to different people. But in practice pay equity has come to mean something very specific—programmes that determine value through job evaluation plans which assess skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions.



8. LEGISLATION - GETTING ON THE BANDWAGON

In 1985, Manitoba became the first Canadian province to pass pay equity laws. They included the provincial civil service and some other public sector institutions. In 1987, Ontario also passed pay equity legislation. Many people saw these laws as ground-breaking because, for the first time in North America, they included the private sector. Other pay equity laws have since been passed in some other provinces. However, while governments, the media and some feminists have praised these laws as victories for the women's movement, others concerned with the fight against wage discrimination are not so sure...



9. WHAT IS VALUE ANYWAY?

Women are taking a second look at strategies for attacking wage discrimination that rely on determining value. Value is a subjective idea and, in any case, historically it has not been the way men's wages were set. Focusing only on pay equity laws has meant that other strategies for attacking wage discrimination—getting a better, livable minimum wage, achieving labour laws that make it easier for women to unionize, and others—have drifted to the sidelines.

Many women believe that the job evaluation plans required by pay equity legislation cannot work in the best interests of women. It is no accident that many politicians who previously opposed any action on wage discrimination are now promoting job evaluation as the **only** way to go.

10. THE FUTURE

Women continue to suffer the effects of wage discrimination. Even where pay equity laws exist, they are of limited benefit. As feminists fighting to get more money for women, we will need to employ a variety of strategies, and we will need to include those women who are most affected.

Equal pay for women is a popular issue right now. We must be sure that we are in control of the solutions.

THE ISSUE:

WAGE DISCRIMINATION

In every known human society...men may cook or weave or dress dolls or hunt hummingbirds ...if such activities are appropriate occupations of men, then the whole society, men and women alike, votes them as important. When the same occupations are performed by women, they are regarded as less important.

Margaret Mead, Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World

In 1962, anthropologist Margaret Mead spelled out what many of us now accept—what we are paid stems not from what we **do** but from who we **are**. Canadian society, like almost all others, has believed that the work men do is more valuable than the work women do—not because it is more skilled, requires more effort, or has more responsibility or worse working conditions, but because it is men doing it.

Pay equity has been called the working women's issue of recent years. But pay equity is not the issue. Pay equity is just one possible solution to the broader issue of wage discrimination. A campaign for pay equity is a **strategy**. It is not the only strategy we can choose, nor is it necessarily the best one.

To measure the benefits of any proposed strategy for change, it is important to be clear about **what** the issue is. It is also important to outline **why** the issue is important—not in theoretical concepts, but in concrete terms.

Then we must understand who is most affected by the issue, and be clear about the similarities and differences among women. An issue most often does not affect everyone in the same way or to the same degree, and a strategy which works for some women may do little or nothing for others. Finally, it is necessary to be clear about **what strategies have been most effective** in the past to address the issue.

The **what** of wage discrimination may seem obvious—that women are paid less for their work than are men. This has been described as the "undervaluing" of women's work, hence the call throughout this century for "equal pay for work of equal value."

But we also need to understand the reasons for and the effects of this "undervaluing" of women's work. Women's work has been paid less primarily because women do it. Women, in general, work at different jobs than men. Most "women's work" is directly related to the unpaid work we do in the home, such as childcare, nursing, etc.

Women were seen as needing less money than men because we were supposedly working for "pin money" or to supplement family income. We have been defined as needing only enough to support ourselves—if we were unlucky or unwise enough not to have a male "provider." By defining women's work as less valuable than men's work, women could be kept in a position of economic dependence. Employers were happy because they had a source of cheap labour for the jobs that women do, and male workers could rest assured that women could not compete for better paid jobs.

The point of all of this is that women's work has not been undervalued because someone sat down and decided parts of women's work (such as the skills, effort, responsibility and working conditions now used in pay equity programmes) were "objectively" (or even subjectively) worth less than men's, but because of the unequal power between men and women that made it possible to divide the workforce into male and female parts,

and define the female part as undeserving of better pay.

When we consider who is most affected by wage discrimination, it is clear that the vast majority of women working for pay are affected to some degree. After all, most women work in the "women's work" areas of clerical work, services and sales. Professional women also feel the effects—as any nurse or librarian will tell us. And even within occupational groups, women's specialties tend to be clustered at the low end of the pay scale.

All of these groups of women need strategies to address unequal pay. But some women are harder hit by lower pay than others. Women in the lowest paying jobs—non-union jobs, jobs at or near the minimum wage, jobs which are the most drastically underpaid—suffer most from the effects of wage discrimination. A strategy which does not include these women, or does not facilitate the development of a complementary strategy to meet their needs, is inadequate and short-sighted.

So, why do women need to act on this issue? Again, the answer may seem obvious—to ensure that women's work is valued equally to men's work. But what does this mean in concrete terms? The bottom line is *money*. Women need and deserve more of it.

Getting more money for women will contribute to women achieving economic independence. This also means independence in many other areas of our lives. And we can be sure that when our work is better paid, it will also be more valued.

What strategies have been effective in getting more money for women? One important strategy is organizing women into unions. While unionized women do suffer from wage discrimination, the wage gap is much smaller than for non-union women. So one strategy for getting more money for women is unionizing more women. To do this, we need better labour legislation to make it easier for women to join unions. We also need to pressure the union movement to pay more attention to smaller workplaces where many low paid women work.

For women in unions, a number of strategies have proved effective in getting more money, including: negotiating a flat dollar rate instead of percentage increases; "bottom loading" wage increases so that low paid workers receive a greater increase than higher paid workers; and, getting equal base (or entry) rates for groups of employees that are mainly male or female.

These strategies can (and should) be argued for as attacks on wage discrimination.

The minimum wage has a major effect on the wages of low income women. Although the fight for an adequate, livable minimum wage has not been very successful, many people have said that a real increase in the minimum wage would be the single, most beneficial improvement for low paid women workers.

Finally, of course there are pay equity programmes. They have given wage increases to some women workers in areas where legislation exists. However, pay equity programmes rely on costly, complicated job comparison plans. These plans are very difficult to control, and they have little applicability in small non-union workplaces where women are more likely to earn minimum wage.

Because pay equity is seen as the solution to wage discrimination it can also be used against women who choose a better, more appropriate strategy, such as raising the minimum wage or equalizing base rates.

The rountable which follows illustrates how this happens.

THE ROUNDTABLE

COMMITTEE ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR WOMEN IN THE CIVIC WORKFORCE

The Committee on Affirmative Action for Women in the Civic Workforce was established by Vancouver City Council in the mid-1980s. It includes delegates from the following unions representing city employees: Vancouver Municipal and Regional Employees Union (VMREU, city inside workers), Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Locals 1004 (city outside workers) and 391 (library workers), and the British Columbia Nurses Union (BCNU). It also includes a representative from the excluded (non-unionized) staff through the Vancouver Managerial and Professional Staff (VMAPS), as well as a designated member of city council and the director of Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) for the city. The police and fire fighters unions have spaces on the committee, but so far have not participated.

In July 1989, the committee took a series of recommendations on pay equity to city council. The most significant of these was a recommendation to equalize the base rates of pay for inside workers (mostly women) and outside workers (mostly men). This recommendation was defeated, although it had previously passed at the city's finance committee in June. In our roundtable with members of the Committee on Affirmative Action for Women in the Civic Workforce, we discussed the history and development of the committee, with a focus on their work on pay equity.

In the 1980s, various levels of government set up ways of responding to the demand of their women workers for improved conditions. The City of Vancouver was no exception. Although a committee to focus on women's concerns had been recommended in 1982, it was a few years later when the director of Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) established three "citizens committees" to deal with concerns of visible minorities, the disabled, and women. The Committee on Affirmative Action for Women in the Civic Workforce was established.

As is often true of such committees, neither city council nor the director of EEO gave any clear guidelines for what it was supposed to do. In the absence of discussions within the committee to establish its own direction, its early work was not very effective.

However, the committee did take one positive step. It decided to hold a series of forums in different parts of the city workforce where women could come to discuss their needs. It got permission to hold these forums on work time. This is essential for women who have both work and family responsibilities that limit their participation. One such forum was held in the Health Department. Many women came, and the forum was a success.

But the forum's success was not to be repeated:

The first forum was so successful we were told not to have any more.

Because the committee was a creation of city council, the tactics it chose could be vetoed by the city.

After the city had decided that there would be no more forums, a sub-committee was formed to come up with another way to connect with the women whose interests it was trying to represent. But the sub-committee itself was plagued by a lack of continuity:

We had a lot of members, but very seldom the same members two weeks running. There was a hard core of about five of us who turned up regularly, but otherwise it fluctuated.

The sub-committee did discuss some other ways to reach women city workers. Its members prepared a questionnaire, although it was never sent out. Later, the sub-committee was integrated into the main committee, with the question of how to build a base among the women workers still unanswered.

In 1985, the committee decided it had to be more focused and to work on a specific issue:

The issue we picked with, I think, a lot of help from the director of EEO, was the EEO programme in the city and how effective it could be with one person working on it.

For over a year, the committee worked on a brief concerning the EEO programme. Although the brief focused on the EEO programme itself, it also touched upon the issue of equal pay. Some women on the committee deliberately "buried" general statements about equal pay and equal benefits in this brief in order to get them passed.

●

EQUAL PAY CHOSEN AS A KEY ISSUE

After they had taken the 1986 brief to council, the members of the committee looked for another issue to pursue. They soon decided that their next issue would be equal pay:

Without too much debate, we decided that it was one of the key issues for women in the civic workforce. To put it simply, women don't get paid well enough. When you come right down to it, the number one priority for most people is wages.

Deciding on the issue, however, was much easier than agreeing on the approach the committee would take. Some favoured job evaluation as the only way of addressing the issue; others wanted a more direct approach to increasing women's wages. The conflict dominated the committee's discussions:

That's where we got into huge arguments. We spent a year and a half on that question. We were fine as long as we were talking about equal pay for women. But the minute we got down to specifics, you know, what did we really want, what we were going to be recommending in that report, we got into a real bun fight. We were at complete loggerheads.

Those favouring job evaluation had the weight of legislation in the United States and other Canadian provinces on their side. As one woman said:

The legislated route has definitely been through job evaluation, and that has its own sort of authority to it. Then that becomes what we have to do. But why chose a path that isn't the best way to go?

The job evaluation model was most strongly favoured by the representatives of excluded staff. Challenging city management is difficult for those seeking to rise within it.

One woman, a member of the excluded staff herself, said:

These people are working their way up in management, and if you bring anything up before the city manager, anything that's controversial, nothing will be said.

The chair of the committee was particularly attached to using job evaluation.

At the same time some feminists and trade unionists were critical of job evaluation. They saw it as a management-controlled process and an ineffective way of dealing with wage discrimination. Unions in the city had previously proposed the equalization of base rates of outside and inside workers as a more effective way of bringing up women's wages.

Resolving the conflict was not an easy task:

We had to go through that whole debate about job evaluation in the committee, and it took six to eight months of going over what all the problems are and why that's not a very good way to go and so on and so on. People are very comfortable with job evaluation.

They're used to it, and it's the way the system works now, and on top of that, it's the way everyone else is doing it.

Focusing on internal differences is a common problem amongst committees that have been created by the system they are intended to change, and this committee was no exception. The committee members put their energy into resolving these internal differences. As a result, they gave little attention to raising the issue among the women who are most affected by it.

One woman said:

I feel like we didn't do a very good job in keeping people informed.

Another woman added:

I think for the committee to get information out into the workforce was difficult because you have a committee that's meeting for two hours once a month, and people who don't tend to see each other outside of that time. It's quite hard to get some impetus going. You spend the first half of your meeting more or less getting back together again to reach the point you were at the last meeting.

The conflict between job evaluation and other methods continued through the writing of the brief. The brief was written, discussed, and rewritten by different members of the committee. Its main thrust at any given point depended on who had done the latest revision.

Finally, after many months, Alderwoman Libby Davies (the city council representative on the committee) was able to help the group get beyond the impasse. She "brokered a compromise" that proposed short-term and long-term solutions:

She put it to us that we should look at short-term and long-term solutions. We talked about how job evaluation would take a long time to do. It might take 10 years or more to accomplish. And in the meantime, women would still be getting these lousy salaries.

So we decided that the short-term measure we would propose would be things that the city could do right away, like equalizing base rates, getting rid of the increments, or across the board increases.

At the same time the city could be looking at this long-term job evaluation, and at some point in the future we would have a restructured pay plan.

The brief did not specifically mention job evaluation, but used a phrase that could potentially include it: "and other methods that would ensure pay equity."

This gave committee members a way out. A final resolution of the job evaluation conflict became unnecessary. The committee at last had a brief it could take forward.

●

NO ILLUSIONS IT WOULD BE EASY

The committee was under no illusions that getting the brief accepted at city council would be easy. In fact, members of the committee said that the purpose of the brief at this stage was to use it as a consciousness raising tool—to lobby council and to get community groups involved:

There was literally not a hope in hell of getting the brief passed. We thought it wasn't going to go anywhere. But we thought we could use it as consciousness raising around the issue, and we were going to pursue that.

Unionized women on the committee took the brief to their unions before proceeding to council and the community.

One woman described this as a "tortuous process," requiring at least five revised drafts in response to union comments. Again, the conflict between job evaluation and a more direct approach reared its head:

One of the unions had given it to one of their staffers, who is a job evaluation specialist. She was hired from BC Hydro where she had been on the management side in the whole job evaluation they did there. Which is the very same plan that made [one union activist who had been involved] absolutely, fervently against job evaluation. So the staffer went over our brief with a fine tooth comb and didn't like it because it didn't recommend job evaluation.

Nevertheless, the committee persevered and the revised brief was one that the unions involved would support.

Because the committee was a creation of city council, the brief had to be forwarded to the city manager before it could be released more broadly. The city manager, too, raised the job evaluation issue. He claimed that since the report did not recommend it, it did not deal with pay equity.

It was clear that the city bureaucracy was not terribly worried about what the committee was recommending:

At this point, I don't think the city manager took us very seriously. His report back to us was a little condescending and didn't make any substantive recommendations to the finance committee whatsoever. He recommended only that the brief be received and referred to the GVRD for consideration during union negotiations.

The committee was very clear that the next step was to get community support for its brief:

It's always critical to remember what your real strategy is, which is to get out into the world, to get people mobilized around it, not necessarily to get it passed, because we had decided that would not really be possible.

Yet despite the fact that the committee identified community support as central to its strategy, it had little discussion as to what parts of the community might be most supportive. It decided to distribute the brief as broadly as possible and ask for letters of support:

We just made a huge list. Everybody just tossed into the pot anyone they could think of who should get a copy.

This lack of focus meant that the response from the community was "very mixed." Some groups from whom the committee had expected support did not give it, while support came from "surprising places."

The committee also sent the brief to the media. But the committee did not make it clear that it was asking for coverage of the pay equity issue in general and the brief in particular. Some media people interpreted the committee's approach as a request for partisan support, and therefore did not act on the committee's appeal.

Some of these problems came up because the committee members were rushed at this stage. They had no control over when the brief would be presented, first to the finance committee and then to city council.

This is a difficulty in working on a committee which is forced to respond to someone else's timetable—in this case, city council's.

Again, at this point in the process the committee did not focus on getting support and involvement from women workers as a group. If the committee had paid attention earlier in the game to building a base among clerical workers, much of its work might have been easier.

For example, the committee might have had more visible support in the political process. It might have had more women willing to become involved in selling the issue in the broader community. Committee members would have been able to collect more concrete examples of the real effects of underpaying women. Certainly they would have increased the potential for mobilizing those women who have the most to gain.

●

SURPRISED BY SUCCESS

After soliciting community support, the committee focused on lobbying members of city council. The committee planned to be as non-confrontational as possible—to respond to questions, clarify points, and gather the opinions of council members.

The response was "surprisingly good." Only one council member refused to meet with representatives of the committee, and several were supportive of the brief.

During the lobbying, however, committee members became aware that the director of EEO did not support the committee's position:

After we went to see the mayor was the first time we discovered that the director of EEO did not support equalization of base rates... I didn't know that. So I phoned around to everybody and they said, no, they didn't know that either. As far as we knew she had not expressed her opposition at any time until just before it went to the finance committee.

In the committee the director of EEO had remained silent about her disagreements with the recommendations. In fact, she had said that she could be used as a resource person when the brief went to the finance committee.

Her lack of support for the brief—in particular her lack of support for equalizing base rates—came as a complete surprise to the committee:

The thing that made me angry was that she wasn't up front about it.

One woman said that she thinks the director was protecting her position with the city hall bureaucracy:

Nobody's going to get that job at city hall unless they know the politics at city hall. And nobody's going to keep that job unless they play those politics.

All of this set the stage for the presentation of the brief to the finance committee of council in early June 1989.

The committee had decided to have a few carefully selected presentations. These were provided by the chair of the committee, the representative of excluded staff, and a member of the Women's Research Centre, who some months previously had published a study on pay equity critical of job evaluation.

After considerable debate, the recommendations contained in the brief passed—much to the surprise of the committee:

After the meeting we stood in the hallway stunned!

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THE BACKLASH

The women on the committee were not the only ones who were surprised by their success. The bureaucracy, both at city hall and at the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), "went into gear."

They saw that women might actually win something substantial, and something that would cost the city money, if the performance was repeated at city council:

Suddenly, everyone from the city manager's office to the GVRD Labour Relations was producing figures and arguments to defeat the equalization of base rates recommendation.

The committee had to step up the pace to try to counter the flood of opposition from the city and the region. It was virtually impossible for the committee, as a volunteer group, to counter the flood of opposition:

I think the first thing to realize when we are doing something like this is that we are amateurs, but the other side are professionals, they are paid to do that. We're all doing this on our own time.

They've got a dozen flunkies to get their facts and figures for them and put everything together, whereas we've spent six months trying to get a hold of the facts and figures that nobody will release to us.

Nevertheless, the committee tried hard to deal with the opposition. It focused on several major points raised by the opposition, in particular the director of EEO's suggestion that affirmative action was a more important issue than pay equity for women in the city work force.

The committee lined up its speakers for the July 25 city council meeting, including the chair of the committee, representatives of various unions involved, and another representative from the Women's Research Centre. When the agenda arrived, nobody from the opposition within the city bureaucracy or the region was listed to speak.

However, when the evening of the council meeting arrived, it was clear that council members had simply waited until the last minute so that no one would know what they had planned. One woman described getting the agenda for the meeting a few days previously:

The agenda was there, and there were all our speakers, and there was nobody from their side speaking.

When we got to the council meeting, of course, there were all our speakers, and then there was a representative from the GVRD Labour Relations Department, and there was the chair of the GVRD, and the deputy city manager, and the EEO director.

The unusual secrecy with which the "other side" had been organized was an indication of the extent of the "behind-the-scenes" activity organized to defeat the proposal.

The meeting was long and drawn out. The committee presented its report to council, followed by the speakers it had lined up in support.

Questions addressed to the speakers make it clear that two main arguments were being used against the committee's report—that it did not define pay equity as job evaluation and that women should focus more on moving into higher paid, male dominated jobs rather than fight for better wages for women's work.

Representatives of management from the city and the GVRD raised the issue of cost—and their cost estimates were vague and misleading. But it was clear that the bottom line was money, regardless of the other arguments used to rationalize opposition to the report:

The big thing was, it will cost too much. And that was the real killer in the council meeting.

The director of EEO played a significant role in the defeat of the committee's report by recommending alternatives that council could support without making a commitment to paying women more. Although she didn't attack the equalization of base rates directly, when questioned she was clear that she supported only job evaluation, not the more direct methods advocated by the committee.

Members of the committee believe that council had orchestrated a move that would allow it to endorse a position which says it supports women, but in practice achieves nothing concrete. One woman said:

Finally one of the alderwomen suggested a compromise that excluded the committee's main recommendation on equalizing base rates. And the mayor was quite ready for it. It was immediately moved.

Another woman added:

They voted in favour of everything except actually giving women money.

The only thing that didn't pass was the clause that contained the equalization of base rates and the increment steps.

In the end, only four members of council supported the committee's crucial recommendation. One alderman, who had voted in favour at the finance committee, changed his vote. Another alderman, who had told the committee he was supportive, joined the bandwagon against the committee.

The politicians and the bureaucracy had been successful in overturning the committee's earlier victory at the finance committee.

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ASSESSING THE OUTCOME

Despite having their key recommendation overturned, the committee members did not see their work as resulting in a total defeat. After all, they had known from the outset that the task would not be easy, and had seen their job as one of consciousness raising.

One committee member said:

I think if we had not had the recommendation on equal base rates passed at the finance committee, we would have considered ourselves a tremendous success.

Another woman added that it was important that members of council did not feel they could directly oppose the concept of pay equity:

Even this council, reactionary as it is, could see that this was an issue that had to be addressed in some way or another. You couldn't simply... say you didn't have to deal with it. And none of them went for that, not one of them. That was truly amazing. We have come an incredible way in terms of pay equity becoming an issue that has to be addressed.

The committee members believe that this recognition that the issue of pay equity is here to stay will affect the position of both the city and the unions in the upcoming negotiations for a union contract in 1991. The fact that members of council had argued against passing the equalization of base rates by saying it was a matter for contract negotiations can be used later:

From a negotiating point of view, we do have a council that says we have to have some movement in this area. And we have a council that said over and over in that final debate, "This is an item that has to go to negotiations." So we go to negotiations and say,

"Fine, here we are in negotiations. Now you guys said you would deal with these issues. Come on. Deal with them."

Committee members think that the consciousness raising aspect of their work on the issue will also push the unions involved to give more priority to the issue.

The other thing we have gotten out of this is that for the JNC, that's the Joint Negotiating Committee for all of the municipal locals, pay equity is now a very high priority issue. It's always been there, you know, but it's always been one of the expendable ones. It isn't really as expendable any more.

Work on the issue of pay equity continues. The committee members believe that they have had an impact in terms of consciousness raising, and that their action at city hall has paved the way for future work—both in the committee and through union negotiations. They are taken more seriously now, especially in their dealings with the city bureaucracy. They get information more quickly, and are treated with more respect.

As one woman said:

I think that the people who sit across from us in the meetings at the city manager's office are very well aware that something has begun.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING GOALS AND BUILDING A BASE

Committee members also see that they have learned important lessons from their experience—lessons that will guide their future work.

Some of the lessons relate to the internal organization of the committee and the need to clearly prioritize its work. First, said one woman, it is important to know what resources are available:

You have to consider, What are the capabilities of your group? How much time do you have? Do you have any money? How many members of the committee are actually working members of the committee?

Committee members emphasize that it is important to be clear from the outset just what the committee is trying to accomplish.

One woman said:

You need to have the discussion about what your goals are and all the rest of it right near the beginning so that you don't spend eighteen months trying to write a report because you really fundamentally disagree on something.

Another woman said:

I think, in actual fact, we could have spent two minutes on the report and six months on the lobbying, instead of eighteen months on the report.

Other lessons relate to the need to build support: from the unions, from the community and most importantly, from the women workers themselves.

Committee members stressed that time could have been spent on reporting back to the groups that the committee members represented. Most of the comments focused on reporting back to the unions. Members of the committee said that this reporting process—to the rank and file members as well as the leadership—is critical:

I think it's really important, and something that groups don't do very often, to make fairly consistent reports to your representative group so that they know what's going on, so if there are problems they can identify them earlier in the process, and not at the very last minute, because that can ruin it.

While the committee was clear that getting support from the wider community was an important part of their strategy, it learned that more attention should be paid to how best to develop that support:

I think what you have to do is to cast your net far wider than we did. Probably it would have been better prior to sending out our report, to send out a little, very unacademic spiel about pay equity. Very simple, little stories about what's happening to women. I think those real stories are what appeal to people. And maybe we could follow up later with a copy of the report asking for support.

Developing a base of support, both among women directly affected by the issue and in the broader community, is especially important on an

issue like pay equity because of the great opposition to anything that will cost money:

Certainly when you pick on something like this that is going to cost a lot of money, you have to be aware that you're really poking the system in a sensitive spot. If they do take you seriously, they're going to come down on you like a ton of bricks.

Clearly, appealing only to a sense of justice is not enough—a solid base of support to back up women's demands is vital.

Directly involving the women workers who stand to gain the most from the committee's work would have had several important short-term and long-term benefits.

First, it might have provided more women to help with the committee's work. Secondly, being able to show that the women directly affected supported the equal base rate strategy might have helped break the impasse between that strategy and the job evaluation model. Thirdly, mobilization of women workers would have made it possible to exert greater pressure on the politicians. It would also have lead to strengthening the unions' position in negotiations.

In the long term, having a base of women who have been involved in the process would make it more difficult for the city to roll back the successes of the committee. Unions which have given the issue higher priority will pursue the issue more or less actively depending on pressure from their members. City council itself will find it increasingly difficult to withstand organized pressure from its workfore. The more solid the base of women who push for change from the inside, the easier the process of building community support will be.

The committee members also learned that it is important to be prepared for different reactions to their work and to be able to shift strategy accordingly. Their surprise victory at the finance committee caught them somewhat off guard:

The other thing I learned out of all of this is that there were all kinds of things on which we really got caught on the hop. We had spent so much time getting our basic position to where everyone could really agree on it, and we didn't get to "Whoa, what if they say they're really going to do this? Then what?" And that's where we really got caught after the finance committee meeting.

We had no contingency plan at all for being even vaguely successful. We had no expectations, and so we hadn't done... so OK, you equalize base rates, what does that really mean? We were trying to scrape it all together at the last minute. It was crazy.

Despite the problems faced by the committee, the pay equity issue has a much more prominent position at Vancouver city hall than it had before the committee began its work.

The future of the issue there will depend on the ability of women to continue to bring pressure through both collective bargaining and the political process. It will require a campaign in the union locals and in the community, backed up by a more clearly developed proposal of how to accomplish pay equity without the usual problems that come out of job evaluation. Most importantly, it will require a larger base of women prepared to fight in their own interests for better pay.

PAY EQUITY: IS IT A GOOD ENOUGH ANSWER?

Women have learned that pay equity programmes are at best a limited remedy for wage discrimination. Yet pay equity is being promoted as *the* answer. In considering directions for future work, it is important to be clear about what pay equity has come to mean and why it is inadequate to meet our needs.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PAY EQUITY PROGRAMMES?

Pay equity programmes have these characteristics in common.

• *THEY ARE PROACTIVE PROGRAMMES*

Proactive means that employers are required by law to take action to implement a pay equity plan. Previous legislation to address wage discrimination (such as the Canadian Human Rights Act provisions for equal pay for work of equal value) has been called complaints-based—that is, individual employees (or their unions) have been required to identify discrimination and make a complaint.

• *THEY ARE BASED ON A COMPARISON OF JOB CONTENT AND REQUIRE SOME FORM OF JOB EVALUATION*

Comparison of job content is done by assessing the **skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions** of jobs in male and female dominated job classes. This means that a job evaluation plan must be used.

Job evaluation plans are generally extremely complicated. Using them assumes that it is both possible and desirable to determine the "value" of work as a basis of pay. It also assumes (wrongly) that historically there has been a rational means through which male wages have been determined and that it is now only necessary for women to fit ourselves into this rational system.

• *THEY ADDRESS WAGE DISCRIMINATION ONLY WITHIN INDIVIDUAL WORKPLACES*

Pay equity programmes only consider people who work for the same employer when making comparisons. While there is some variation in how "employer" is defined, people who work for different employers cannot be compared.

• *THEY ARE PHASED-IN PROGRAMMES*

Pay equity programmes take years to implement. In all existing legislation, the *shortest* time period for employees to receive their final wage adjustments is 6 years (2 years to determine and implement a job evaluation plan and 4 years to phase-in wage increases). For other workers, the time period may be much longer.

• *THEY CLAIM TO END GENDER-BASED WAGE DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE*

Although feminists who support pay equity programmes generally speak of them as only a first step toward addressing wage discrimination, many others (including governments that pass the programmes, the media, pay equity consultants and others) most often present pay equity as the "solution" to the problem—that is, once we have done a pay equity programme, the problem is solved and wage discrimination is a thing of the past.

DOES PAY EQUITY MEET THE STANDARDS OF A SUCCESSFUL RESPONSE?

Seven questions can be asked of legislative reform to help us decide if it is an adequate response to an issue. We call them "standards of success." On the following page, we ask these questions of pay equity programmes.

STANDARD	PAY EQUITY
Does it deliver?	**qualified yes for some women** • many women left out—most often most poorly paid • many women included will see only limited increases • unionized women in best position to get the most out of legislation
Is it implementable?	**not easily** • very lengthy and cumbersome implementation process
Is it understandable?	**no** • very complicated job evaluation plans • pay equity consultants have control of the process
Can we mobilize around it?	**in the short term, yes** • pay equity is a very popular issue • in the long term, it's more difficult: pay equity programmes are complicated, hide the value judgments being made, and take years to complete—these factors may hinder continued organizing on the issue
Is it monitorable?	**no** • information controlled by consultants • impact not felt for years • pay equity makes no claim to address the wage gap, so cannot be judged on this
Is it entrenched?	**no** • "one-shot" adjustments, no adequate mechanisms to ensure that gains made are kept
Does it avoid placing limits on future advances?	**no** • by presenting pay equity as a solution, governments and employers can claim they have addressed the issue of wage discrimination and that no further action is needed

DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVES

At best, pay equity provides a very limited solution to wage discrimination. Furthermore, we have seen how the narrow definition of pay equity as a job comparison based programme can actually be used against women developing other strategies. So, in our development of other ways of addressing wage discrimination, we face two tasks—identifying other strategies **and** re-thinking the scope of the issue to include these other strategies. In doing this, we need to:

- **keep the issue *grounded in women's experience*—**in this case, this means remembering that the goals are getting more money for women, particularly those at the lower end of the wage scale, and closing the wage gap.
- **focus on the *results*, not just the process—**achieving a "victory" in legislation or policy is not an end in itself, the real victory is what women gain as a result.
- **broaden the issue *beyond narrow definitions*—**finding ways of combating the view that pay equity is *the* answer to wage discrimination will be critical for future gains on this issue.

SOME OPTIONS

Non-unionized women are clearly in most need of strategies that will deliver. These might include:

- a campaign for a livable minimum wage
- a focus on organizing unorganized women—women's wages increase by more than $3 an hour when they are unionized
  - local action to organize women
  - a push for better labour laws to make it possible for women to organize
  - to develop connections with women in the labour movement in the interests of making unions more responsive to women's particular needs.

Unionized women will, of course, use the collective bargaining process, whether or not pay equity legislation or programmes exist. However, unless the issue is redefined more broadly, any gains achieved through pay equity will become the ceiling of possible gains for women. Some strategies might include:

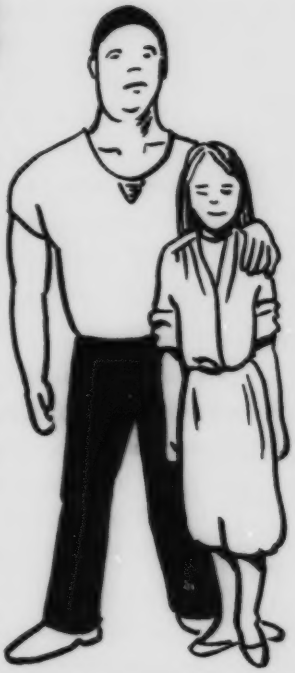
- keeping control of the issue of wage discrimination as a political issue, and not allowing it to be reduced to a technical process of job comparison.
- working with unorganized women to ensure that pay equity is not allowed to become the single solution to the wage gap.

At a Glance... WIFE ASSAULT

1. BATTERED WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

Each year in Canada, at least one in ten women are assaulted by the men they are involved with. Men who beat their partners hit and punch them, throw things at them, break their bones and cause internal injuries. Many women are also sexually assaulted and emotionally abused by their male partners.

For some women the violence is a part of everyday life. For others it happens every week or every couple of months. No matter how often a woman is abused, there are serious consequences. Battered women describe feeling they are wrong, bad, stupid. Many come to believe what the batterer's tell them: that it's all their fault.



2. CENTURIES OF PERMISSION

Throughout history men have had the right to "discipline" or beat their wives. Wife beating and wife killing were accepted in Greek and Roman societies. Throughout the Middle Ages, wife beating was openly encouraged in countries across Europe.

Women have long been considered to be men's property. Women were expected to obey their husbands' authority completely. Although today's laws say that wife assault is a crime, many old attitudes towards women prevail.

3. WOMEN'S MOVEMENT INITIATIVES

In the 1960's and 70's, feminists started consciousness-raising groups and women's centres where women could talk about their lives. It soon became clear that wife battering was a major problem for women in our society.

Feminists organized transition houses as safe places where battered women and their children could go to get support and help from other women. Feminists also educated the public about the problem. They tried to encourage institutions and social services to make changes that would help women and stop wife assault.

4. SOCIETY'S RESPONSE

Governments, social services, and academics responded by agreeing to study the problem feminists had named. They tried to figure out why "families" are violent and what causes the violence.

Many studies suggested women must like to be beaten or they would leave violent men. They often ignored the economic realities of women's lives and the immobilizing effects of wife battering. Most used gender-neutral language that hid the fact that it is men who beat women. Public attitudes changed very slowly.

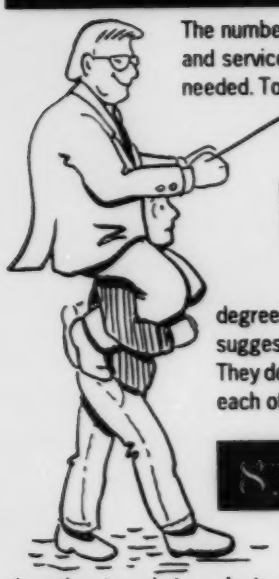
5. SMALL STEPS FORWARD

Over the years, pressure from women's groups forced institutions to take wife battering more seriously. Governments made more funding available to transition houses and support groups for battered women. They supported groups to get batterers to stop beating their wives. Federal and provincial governments declared that wife assault is a crime. They developed policies which told police officers to arrest assaultive men. But few governments have followed up to make sure the policies are acted on.

6. THE STRINGS ATTACHED TO GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSES

The number of government-funded transition houses and services continues to grow but still more money is needed. Too many houses have to turn women away due to lack of space. Too few houses are accessible to disabled women.

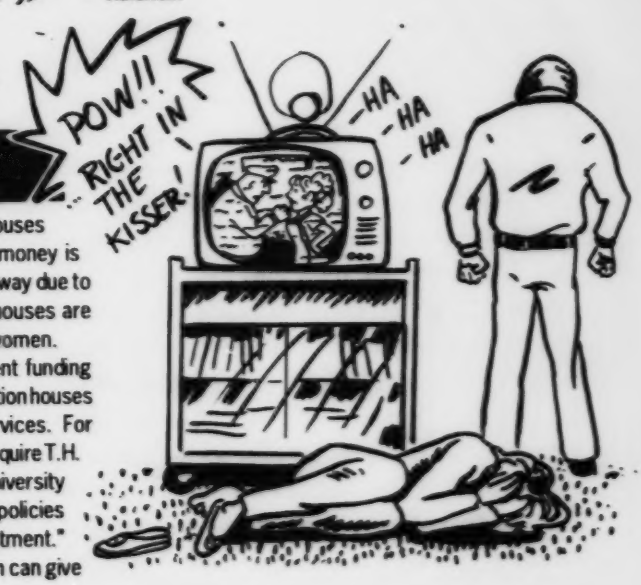
Also, many government funding policies are turning transition houses into traditional social services. For example, funders often require T.H. workers to have a university degree in social work or counselling. These policies suggest that battered women need "treatment." They don't value the support battered women can give each other.



7. CHANGING ATTITUDES

Feminists' success in getting institutions to respond has meant that many more battered women can find the support they need to escape violence. There is much more awareness in society today that wife assault is wrong, and that no one deserves to be beaten.

However, there is still a long way to go. Battered women are still accused of "provoking" their mates to violence. There are still lots of jokes about wife beating. Men who are convicted of assaulting their wives often receive very light sentences, if they are punished at all. Women still struggle to be economically independent of men. Movies, television and magazines still portray women as legitimate targets of male violence.



8. LOTS OF WORK LEFT TO DO

In the 90s, feminists face many difficult tasks. We have to continue the struggle to make transition houses safe and accessible for battered women. This means we have to maintain houses as feminist services that support a woman's right to make her own choices, and that respect the values of women from other cultures.

We also need to do more to make it physically possible for disabled women to use transition houses and support groups. We have to become more responsive to the needs of visible minority women and immigrant women, and to recognize the work already being done by women in these communities.

We need to continue to monitor government and criminal justice system policies and advocate for better ones.

Finally, we must continue to work to change the subordination of women which makes male violence a fact of our lives.

THE ISSUE:

WIFE ASSAULT

The oppression of battered women is perhaps the most overt and the most intimate of all the ways in which women are oppressed.

Jillian Ridington, The Transition Process: A Feminist Environment as Reconstructive Milieu

Feminists have learned about wife assault by listening to and believing what battered women say about their experience. We have learned that it is men who beat women. We've learned that they do so for two main reasons. One, because society gives men power over women and the right to make the rules in marriage and relationships. Two, because society accepts male violence as a means of social control and one way to control women.

From listening to women's experiences, we've also learned that wife assault happens to women from all economic groups, all educational backgrounds, and all religions, races and cultures. We know that a life of being beaten, threatened, put down, and isolated takes a terrible toll. Women fear for their lives and for their children. Battered women are taught to doubt themselves and blame themselves. They lose confidence in their own abilities.

Battered women are trapped because they have little or no money of their own. Many are also trapped by cultural or religious values that say it's wrong for women to speak up for themselves. To break free, women need understanding and support. They also need decent paying jobs and good, affordable childcare and housing. To build new lives, women need freedom from the threat of further assaults.

Feminists use several strategies to try to stop wife assault. Some strategies focus on battered women's immediate needs. For example, feminists have started support groups, and other services, as the women in the following roundtable have done.

Women have created transition houses where battered women can get shelter and support. Transition houses are also part of longer term strategies. They give women the chance to learn from each other, to learn we're not sick or bad, to learn wife assault is not our fault, and to learn we all deserve better.

Transition houses are also places where the children can begin to unlearn the lessons of wife assault. For we know that children are affected by what they've seen. Girls and boys learn that men are in charge and that men are allowed to beat women. Some children grow up determined to live differently. Most grow up accepting the roles they learned at home and see in the media and all around them.

Feminists' work with women and children contributes to long-term change.

In fact, most of our work combines short-term and long-term strategies. For instance, feminists have pressed for police and justice system policies which would give women more protection against the men who assault them. We want policies that will declare to men, women, and children that no one deserves to be beaten and that violence is not acceptable.

We have lobbied too, on issues such as welfare, jobs, housing, and childcare. We have made speeches and written books and organized conferences to validate women's experience and to change sexist and racist attitudes and practices. We've done workshops and taught courses to try to improve the way professionals respond to women. We have worked to expose the links among wife assault and rape, child sexual abuse, pornography and prostitution.

All of this work affects women's daily lives. Step by step, it also helps to build a society where women and children have freedom from male violence; the authority and right to make our own choices; and the resources we need to live independent lives.

In the following roundtable, we see how feminist strategies around wife assault start from one place: women listening to women, with support, understanding and respect.

THE ROUNDTABLE

INDIA MAHILA ASSOCIATION

Mahila means women. The India Mahila Association (IMA) is an Indo-Canadian women's group founded in Vancouver in 1973. In its early days, the work of the group focused on helping women adjust to life in Canada as well as working with women to keep cultural traditions alive. The group wanted to give women a voice within the Indo-Canadian community, given that the leadership of other organizations was virtually all male.

In the late 1970s, IMA began to focus its attention on the issue of wife assault. In 1981, IMA members formed a victim support committee to respond to the needs of Indo-Canadian women. The roundtable consisted of women from this committee.

Some participants are also members of the education committee, which carries out educational work on wife assault as well as other issues of concern to Indo-Canadian women. Other IMA committees are a cultural committee and a social committee.

The early 1970s saw the re-birth of feminism and a growing awareness among women across Canada. Women in the Indo-Canadian community were no exception. From the initial meetings of four or five women in 1973, the India Mahila Society (IMA) has grown to be a significant voice for Indo-Canadian women.

Like other immigrant women and women of colour, Indo-Canadian women are challenging society on two fronts. Within their community, they are challenging the traditional position of women. More broadly, they are challenging all of Canadian society—women's groups included—to end the exclusion and isolation of Indo-Canadian women.

The women at the roundtable said that one factor leading to the formation of IMA was the fact that existing organizations in their community were led and controlled by men:

> **Wherever the community was active, there were always men represented on the executive and the management. Women will be passive. Like in the temple, they go, they'll sit and participate in the congregation, or cook in the kitchen, but not really participate in the management. The women wanted to have a voice of their own and think about themselves.**

In its early years, IMA focused on meeting some of the immediate needs of Indo-Canadian women. Immigration had increased significantly after 1972, and language training and information about Canadian society was essential for women coming to Canada.

At the same time, IMA was involved in organizing cultural activities designed to maintain women's cultural identity while adapting to life in Canada. So right from the beginning, the women in IMA were working to walk the line between adapting to Canadian society while maintaining their identity.

While the basic orientation of IMA has remained constant, the women also said that the group has changed over time. They described it as a process of becoming more conscious of women's rights and the particular problems facing Indo-Canadian women.

They saw this process as being a part of the raising of consciousness among women in general:

> **The women's movement is growing every day, happening here and there. And then automatically our**

feelings go along with what is happening. So then we try to look at more issues, have more discussions... If we have a problem in our own society, then we try to help.

At the same time as women's consciousness in IMA was developing in parallel to women throughout Canadian society, members of the group also said that changes in their own community influenced the position of women in a very particular way:

The majority of women came after 1972. And the family pattern was very different. I have been here from 1964. I see the family lifestyle changed here. Before, we were more on a North American lifestyle, just follow the footsteps, because we were in such a minority. We didn't have energy as our own community. Then in 1972, more people came, their families came, young people got married. And so the whole thing just changed, the consciousness began to arise.

So the increased vitality of the Indo-Canadian community combined with the growth of the women's movement to cause IMA to have both the means and the confidence to take on women's issues more directly.

By the late 1970s members of IMA were talking about the need to address the issue of wife assault within their own community.

They were especially concerned that representatives of the temples—the main spokesmen for the community—did not take a stronger stand on the issue. Although there was "a lot of noise" when one woman was killed close to the temple, for the most part the leadership of the community was silent.

IMA members decided to call a meeting themselves:

We called a public meeting and we invited all the existing religious or political organizations—men, women, anybody—to come on this day and speak their mind on the issue. Attendance was good, but the temples didn't participate. That was unfortunate. They are the biggest mouthpiece for the community, but they didn't participate.

The lack of participation by the temples was significant, as it sent a message that they did not support the meeting, even if they did not openly oppose it.

IMA's early objective to provide a voice for women in their community had become even more important as it was clear that other community institutions would not address the issue of violence against women, nor would they provide resources to support women who were being victimized.

In 1981, IMA began the victim support programme. Two members completed support group leader training through Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS), a feminist organization providing support groups, information, and educational programmes on wife assault. Following the training, IMA began a support group for Indo-Canadian women.

Out of the first year's experience of the group, IMA organized a cultural event for the Indo-Canadian community, addressing issues of violence. An afternoon of dance, songs, a play and speeches focused on violence against women. Significantly, most of the participants had been victims of violence themselves. It was the first time that many had spoken out. The programme was a great success.

But the positive response to the cultural event did not mean that IMA's work had been wholeheartedly accepted within the Indo-Canadian community.

One woman told us that she believes the women in IMA have often been labelled and scapegoated:

We are labelled in the community, I must admit. Because they say, "There is a bunch of women who are family haters. They encourage women to be emancipated. They are the women who are exciting our women to act as they do." I mean, they don't look at themselves, what's wrong with their own structure, within the family, within their household. It's easy to put the blame on somebody else.

After the cultural event, IMA continued the support group "on and off" for some time. They also expanded their network of one-to-one sup-

port for women, and began a telephone line where women could call for information and support.

At first, the information line was run by one member using her home phone number. More recently IMA has installed a separate telephone with an answering machine. Each woman who calls the line is given the numbers of at least two other women she can call upon for help.

Telephone contact is an extremely important part of IMA's work. Women may be unable to meet in person, or they may take some time to gain enough trust to take the next step. Some women do not speak English, and may literally have no where else to turn.

But whether it is on the telephone or in person, in English, Hindi or Punjabi, IMA's immediate concern is the woman's needs—for support, for legal information, or for practical assistance in implementing her decisions:

Our main way of working is listening on the phone. That's our most basic way. Or sometimes going out and meeting the woman... But we can be talking to the woman on the phone for months before we actually get to see her, because there is just no way of getting to see her.

From there it's basically going on, depending on what her needs are, filling the gaps in. We act as a liaison group, number one. We give her information where it's needed. Does she need to, for instance, separate legally? Can she put a lien against the house? Can she get the house? She's concerned about things like that. Can she go ahead and get her clothes from the house? So those are the kinds of issues we'll deal with.

We take her through the whole process... We're always there for her. What we try to do is make sure we're available for her, for whenever she needs to get in touch with us. That's why we give her the numbers of two other women.

For many Indo-Canadian women, this one-to-one support is critical. Many are concerned with maintaining anonymity, and others are more at ease talking with one person they can rely on. It is a painstaking, often difficult process:

Our actual work with women through the victim support committee is very laborious and tedious. It's a very sort of nose-to-the-ground kind of method. We just carry on that way. And I think that's the model that we use most effectively.

The woman knows that we are there. We don't pressure her into giving more than she wants to. She's aware that the choice is going to be entirely hers, no matter what she does. Even if she wants to go back, that's fine. We're going to be there. We'll say, "Maybe you'll leave him again, and the next time you want to do that, we'll be there. You call us."

Participants in the roundtable said the slowness of the process often comes as a shock to the women working in the victim support programme. Women often begin working in the programme with an intense desire to change women's lives, and can become frustrated and even depressed when change proves to be slow and difficult.

One woman said:

You think you're going to get out there and you're going to fix all these women's problems. The very first person I dealt with was very heavy duty. I went through almost a year of working with her. And you have this vision that by being able to talk with her, she's going to realize that this is not the way she wants to be and she's going to change. I guess that's what you expect at the very beginning. You think that it's going to change, and yet the actual process of change can take almost two to three years. I just figured things would happen quick and then after a while I kind of slowed down and said, "Okay, this is not going to happen that quick."

Paralleling the victim support work, IMA members also carry out educational work on wife assault both inside and outside the Indo-Canadian community. Within the community, they use community newspapers and the Indo-Canadian community cable television shows. They also produce pamphlets for distribution through various community agencies.

Again, the work is often slower than the women would like, as they balance their goal of pushing their community to deal with the issues against the possibility of a backlash.

One woman said:

The television programme often gets comments such as "Don't put those IMA women on again!" or "Who do they think they are, coming out and wrecking our kids, making our women think about rights?"

At other times, the women who IMA is trying to reach may react negatively to what IMA says. For example, on one occasion some women felt that their personal situations had been discussed on a television programme, despite the fact that the IMA spokeswoman had taken care to be very general in the descriptions of abuse. IMA members know that such reactions, however unfounded, can be used to isolate IMA in the community.

So if a programme or article produces too negative a reaction, IMA members will soften their approach for a time until the reaction dies down and they can once again speak with a stronger voice. Once again, IMA balances respect for the women in their community with their goal of pushing the community to respond to the issue of violence against women.

Another part of IMA's work is with women's groups and services in the broader community. The women in the roundtable told us that many women's groups have been supportive of their work. Some have co-operated with IMA in very concrete ways.

Indo-Canadian women have participated in the BWSS support group leaders' training over the years. One member has also taken training through the Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) Rape Crisis Centre, and WAVAW regularly refers women to her. Rape Relief and transition houses provide shelter for Indo-Canadian women. IMA representatives have also worked for many years with a range of women's group on a proposal for a multi-ethnic transition house for Vancouver.

But while there is co-operation, there is also racism. Problems still remain in getting the perspective of Indo-Canadian women integrated into services available outside the Indo-Canadian community. Some Indo-Canadian women—even those who are fluent in English and who are accustomed to Canadian society—are uncomfortable using services outside their own community.

One woman attributed the problems more to ignorance than to overt racism:

There's obviously... not a racial barrier so much as a barrier of ignorance, of not knowing what's happening. Even though we've tried time and time again to have the organizations come out. We had an information sharing session back in 1985 where we invited a lot of the interested groups to come out and talk to us and help us to figure out how we can work better. A lot of groups showed up, and were really enthusiastic about it and everything. But it didn't change things a whole lot.

IMA has also participated in transition house workers' conferences to encourage more awareness and respect for Indo-Canadian women's perspective. Workers in transition houses and other support services need to understand and respect Indo-Canadian women's sense of family and community and honour.

One woman explained:

For starters, it's this whole issue of pride and honour that's wrapped up with the Indian woman. For her to go to a transition house, it's as though she's losing her honour in some way, or she's degrading her family name. Regardless of the battering she's going through, she's still going to feel that way.

●

CHALLENGING INTERNALIZED VALUES

Like other women's groups, IMA is challenging deeply rooted values about the role of women, values that are often internalized by the women themselves:

It's very difficult to take that first step and feel free, to decide for yourself what's right and wrong, instead of the whole community deciding for you. You're "good" if you're living with your husband. You're "good" if you listen to your in-laws. You're "good" if you're just sitting at home looking after your kids. You're "good" if you've just been beaten in the bedroom and come out with a smile on your face. And you're "good" if you keep the family together.

Part of the difficulty in challenging these values comes from fear—fear that if women give up the values of their community there will be nothing left to replace them with:

What we have to deal with is this whole situation of not wanting to let go of the culture... when you have uprooted yourself, come to a different country where the culture is different, the language is different—you are dead scared.

Much of this fear is, of course, justified. The women in IMA know that maintaining the best of their culture is essential. They know too that they must show women that it is possible to make changes without losing their heritage or their community altogether:

I don't mean to leave our culture behind. But within our own culture we have so much to change. We can do our own analysis, decide what is good for us today, and what was good a hundred years back. You don't have to carry on those values. We can leave the ones that are not useful today and develop new ones. It doesn't matter whether it's within the Indo-Canadian community or within the community at large.

The women said that an important way they work on changing values is simply by setting an example to demonstrate that there is another way to live. IMA members are seen in the community as being strong women, and that also affects how other people act.

Sometimes achieving this status has been a painful process. One woman described her experience:

I was divorced and I had left my husband with three kids. There was a time that people would avoid me or ask their wives not to phone me. My good friends ignored me in public, in the market. They'd just turn their back, and just pretend they hadn't seen me. Now these people are writing me, now they're feeling proud. And they're the same people who will call me up when they have a problem.

In addition to providing an example through their own lives, IMA members also take advantage of events in the community to speak out for women. At weddings, for example, they will state their opposition to dowries. When a daughter is born to a family, they will take care to bring the same kind of greetings and congratulations as they would for a son. And in their cultural work, too, they integrate the message that women are valuable:

We try to give examples to the relatives at weddings or births or wherever, just to raise their consciousness that women are an equally important part of society. Even the little songs we sing with our dances, we choose them very consciously, because traditionally they have been about mother-in-law/daughter-in-law friction, women against women—we try to avoid these kinds of songs. So we're always looking at things by which we can give a message to the community.

Although this work to change attitudes may not be obviously related to violence against women, it is important in shifting the view of women in the family—a view which pressures women to remain in violent situations.

Working to shift the view of women in the family and in the community also reflects IMA's knowledge that it is only possible to address the issue of violence if women are seen as having rights in general. Many of the issues that affect all women, such as male authority in the family, economic dependence, the friction that is encouraged between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, also affect battered women in concrete ways.

Sometimes the work which IMA does with battered women who decide to return to their husbands means that the women go back with a changed perspective on these issues. A woman may set conditions on her decision to return. The conditions may include a bank account of her own or a changed relationship with her mother-in-law. And that can lead to a real change for the better.

What is clear from the experience of IMA members in working with Indo-Canadian women is that their approach must be comprehensive and carefully thought through. They must constantly do a balancing act between challenging the position of women in their community and risking being isolated or discounted by their community.

They must also balance women's need for change with their fear of changing their culture and traditions, especially in a new country. They must take into account issues—such as problems with the extended family or immigration laws—that western women encounter only occasionally. And they must deal with the ignorance and racism that Indo-Canadian women often encounter in the wider community.

IMA members attribute their success so far to several things.

One woman said:

We have had success because we started up slowly, and because the other IMA women didn't listen to myself and some others when we wanted to dash in there.

I think that the four or five women who started IMA were clearly infiltrating the community.

Proceeding slowly, of course, requires great staying power. Several women cited the importance of perserverance in their work with individual women, in the Indo-Canadian community, and in the broader community as well.

Women also spoke of the group's clear focus on women's experience as being key:

We have always been a group who will listen and validate what happens to women. Validate their hurts. And to entirely leave the decision of process up to them, yet let them know that we're there as a form of support as utterly as we can be. That would be my way of summing up as to why we've had the successes we've had.

Finally, the women at the roundtable said that openness and open-mindedness within IMA has made it possible for the group to grow and change. Being open-minded, of course, does not mean that there are not strongly held views in the group, especially concerning what strategies to use and how quickly to move in the community. In fact, the question of strategy continues to be the focus of a great deal of discussion—and often disagreement—among IMA members:

That's when we get into squabbles. Political strategies as far as women are concerned. Yes, we have really different ideas.

But, the IMA women explained, they do not allow these differences to overshadow their main goal of supporting women in their community. Through continued discussion—talking through their disagreements—they most often come to a consensus on what to do next. And the differences in the group can be a positive force in the balancing act between moving slowly and the need to challenge the position of women in the community.

On the one hand, the zeal of women who want to move quickly is tempered by the experience of others in the group:

One of our members thinks about ideas and she comes back and says, "Okay, I'm going and I'm not going to do what we said." Then we tell her, "If you want to work with us, don't do that." And then she begins to think. I think it's very good within the group that we have people with various experiences, various backgrounds.

On the other hand, women who have pushed IMA to move more quickly have also influenced the work of the group. One woman said that having women of differing views, combined with the fact that the group is now well-established, means that they are now prepared to take risks that did not seem possible in earlier years:

I think one of the ways the group has grown is that we are being more risk-taking. We've been around for 16 years now, and 16 years ago we just weren't as risk taking as we are today. That's because the group has matured, and also because women of different thinking have joined. So we've gotten, not an update, but an integrated process of attitudes.

In many ways, the future work of IMA will be more of the same—providing support for Indo-Canadian women and challenging both their own community and the broader society to meet their needs. IMA's role as a voice for Indo-Canadian women is as important now as it was when the group began.

At the same time, IMA members are identifying new areas of work and new issues arising from changes in the community. Nowhere, for example, is the clash of values felt more strongly

than among young women, who are increasingly calling upon IMA for support:

Lately, we have another issue which is emerging very fast: the young women, who are caught between two cultures. Parents' values and attitudes are still the same, but the girls are going to Canadian institutions for education and they want to relate to their peers.... Dating, arranged marriages, this is another area where women phone, young women phone us.

In addition to providing this immediate support to young women, IMA has identified educational work among young people caught in the clash of values as an important area for future work.

IMA also sees the need to put increased pressure on the broader society to provide better response to Indo-Canadian women, especially those who are the targets of violence. They feel strongly that isolating services for Indo-Canadian women within their own community would be a mistake. They see developing closer ties with organizations working for women in the broader community as an important objective:

It's important that we work more closely with organizations in the community, number one. Secondly, there is a great lack of Indo-Canadian workers within these organizations. Having more Indo-Canadian workers would provide an open door or a beginning of an understanding.

Specifically, the women said that pushing transition houses to hire more bilingual, bicultural workers—women who understand both systems—is one of the needs they will be focusing on in the future. They pointed out that these workers could not only respond to women from their community more readily, but also, simply through their presence, could increase the awareness of other workers. Women from IMA have also been involved in work for a multi-cultural transition house in Vancouver.

IMA will continue its two challenges in the future: the challenge of confronting sexism within their community and the challenge of confronting racism outside. As one woman concluded, it's likely to be a long struggle to expose and eradicate the problems:

I think ignorance is the biggest thing, and it just stops everyone from moving forward. And that's the biggest thing we have to chip away at. I don't know how long that's going to take. We've taken years digging it up.

WIFE ASSAULT

STOPPING WIFE ASSAULT: OUR LONG-TERM GOAL

It's a political act to start a support group or a transition house or crisis line. It says to the world that wife assault is wrong. It says women have the right to protection and support and freedom from male violence.

Working with battered women teaches us that our society must be changed in very basic ways. We must change the conditions in society that make wife assault possible. But these goals can get lost in the day-to-day demands of working with women and children in crisis.

While it is exciting and inspiring to see women's strength and survival, it is often depressing to realize how much work there is still to do to change the way women are treated.

No one group can do it all. We have to be realistic about what we take on. But we do have to pay attention to our long-term goals. To keep on track, we need to take time regularly to ask ourselves:

- **What are we learning from battered women's experience about how society must change?**
- **How can we build a longer term strategy from the work we do with individual women?**
- **How can we work with other groups in our community on welfare issues? immigration issues? the court system? housing? employment issues?**

Funding for feminist services from government and agencies like the United Way is a hard-won victory. It has meant a lot more transition houses and support groups. It has also meant better programmes for the children and better salaries for the workers. But with the success has come dilemmas about the negative affects of funding.

For example, some governments impose funding formulas that specify a hierarchical staffing structure and require workers to have counselling degrees. Many funders choose to support transition houses run by non-feminist or even anti-feminist community organizations or church groups. Some funders penalize groups for taking a stand on political issues such as women's right to choice on abortion.

The strings attached to funding can dilute the feminist principles and political agenda that created transition houses in the first place. We need to pay attention to how funding is affecting our work:

- **What changes have we made in our own programmes or structure or hiring because of what the funders wanted?**
- **How can we keep transition houses from becoming just another part of mainstream social services?**

Our strategies are also affected by the fact that to do our work we need the support of our community. We need donations from the public. We need to work with professionals in the community: social workers, police, doctors and nurses, landlords, teachers, and so on. We rely on the media to let women in crisis know how to get help.

Getting support from professionals and institutions often requires a balancing act. So does building and maintaining support within our own communities.

- **How radical can we be?**
- **How do we decide when to rock the boat and when to go along?**
- **How do we use our credibility to build support for the radical changes we know are necessary?**

We may shy away from speaking bluntly about battered women's experience. We may fear people will accuse us of hating men or wanting to destroy

the family. We can develop ways of dealing with those kinds of accusations without being silenced by them. We can also decide to take different approaches with different audiences.

As the women in the roundtable showed, the challenge is to speak as plainly and directly as we should, while still maintaining credibility in the community. There are additional pressures upon feminists who are working on this issue within ethnic communities, and upon women working in small towns and rural areas.

There are no simple answers. But to keep our balance, we must keep our eyes focused on the long-term goal—an end to wife assault and the subordination of women.

At a Glance... CUSTODY LAW

1. IS IT A MOTHERHOOD ISSUE

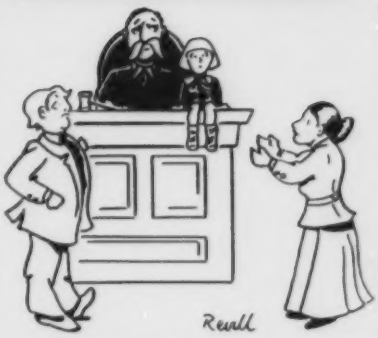
It's commonly assumed that women have a special, even sacred bond with their children and a "natural right" and responsibility to care for them.

But until the beginning of the twentieth century, the father had an absolute right to custody of his children. During the early years of this century, it gradually became the custom, although not the law, for judges to rule in favour of mothers in custody cases.

In 1917, the B.C. Equal Guardianship of Infants Act said that upon separation, the wife had equal rights with the husband in custody matters. Other provinces eventually followed B.C.'s lead.

2. WOMEN AND EQUALITY AND FAMILY LAW

The women's suffrage movement won women the right to vote and hold public office. Canada's first female judge, Helen Gregory McGill, was largely responsible for radical changes to family law. The 1929 Supreme Court ruling in the Persons Case and women's increased participation in the work force, particularly during World War Two, led to greater recognition of women's rights.



Even the courts were affected. By the 1950s, judges ruled that a woman could not be denied custody of her children even if she had committed adultery. Formerly adultery had been interpreted as proof that the woman was an unfit mother.

In 1968, changes to the Divorce Act gave the courts the power to order wives as well as husbands to pay alimony or maintenance to their spouses and children. It also said a wife's **capacity** to earn money should be a factor in maintenance decisions. Laws were beginning to treat women as equal partners in marriage.

3. THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT'S DEMANDS

In the 1960s and 70s the women's movement made women's equality its rallying cry. The movement worked to free women from the bonds that tied them to the home, to men, and to marriage. It challenged the notion that women must be solely responsible for the care of children. It challenged men to spend more time caring for their children. It demanded recognition of women's contribution to the family income, as homemaker, mother, or wage earner. It called on governments to recognize women's right to equality.

4. IS THIS EQUALITY?

The laws that govern the family now assume women and men have equal rights and responsibilities. Although women still usually get custody of their children, more men are asking the courts for custody and winning it.

But on average, women spend four to six hours a day on housework and childcare while men, on average, spend seven to 22 minutes a day minding the kids.

Women are also expected to support themselves and their children with little or no help from men or government. But women earn only about 65% of what men earn.

In the year after divorce, women and children experience a 73% drop in their standard of living. Men's standard of living **increases** by 42%.

Yet 80-85% of fathers ordered to pay child support or maintenance payments do not pay them unless the courts force them to.

The idea of equality doesn't match real life. It certainly doesn't help women to pay the bills.

5. [illegible] CHILDREN

It costs money to raise children. But judges don't have consistent ways of deciding what a child's standard of living should be. Courts are supposed to pay most attention to what is in the best interests of the child. This means being concerned about the love and affection and stability children need as well as money.

But children's needs are too often seen in economic terms. Women can rarely compete with men's offers of music lessons for the kids, a nice house, vacations, and so on.

If a homemaker says she'll go for re-training and try to get a job to support herself and her children it can work against her. The courts can say that this would disrupt the children's homelife.

A mother who argues for custody as a way to protect her children from the father's sexual abuse or physical violence or drinking runs the risk of being accused of wanting revenge against her husband.

6. FATHER'S RIGHTS MEN'S RIGHTS

Men have argued that they should have a say in what happens to the child support money. Some men genuinely want to continue being a real parent to their children after divorce. Some say they can raise their children more cheaply than their wives can, so they go for custody. Some resort to blackmail, saying "I won't pay if I can't see my kids."

Recently men have begun forming groups to push for what they want. These groups have names like Fathers And Children, Their Society (or FACTS, for short) and the Canadian Council for Co-parenting.

They say they want equality for men. To them that means legislated joint custody and laws to enforce their rights to have access to their children.

They're succeeding. Two months after men's rights groups held a 1987 conference on "family rights," the Ontario government introduced legislation to enforce access rights.

7. MEDIATION AND JOINT CUSTODY: THE NEW POKER CHIPS IN THE CUSTODY GAME

The courts are overwhelmed with the increasing number of family law cases. Judges have often found it hard to figure out what is in the best interests of the child. Some of the parents and children involved in these cases want and need help.

Professionals have been called on to help. They have become very powerful players. Their job is mediation. They are supposed to be neutral and objective. They try to satisfy both sides.

In the mediation process, the needs of women and children can get lost. The process can also ignore the fact that men have more economic power than women.

There is serious concern about whether mediators can deal with cases involving wife assault and child sexual abuse. There is also concern that mediators encourage joint custody and shared parenting when those are not the best options.

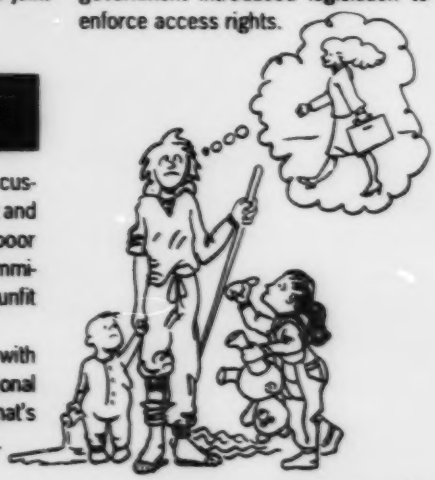
8. REAL LIFE CONFLICTS FACING FEMINISTS

Women are entitled to economic independence and control over their lives. Women shouldn't have to carry all the responsibility for children. Women who don't want to be full-time mothers deserve respect too.

But the fact is in our society, women do take on the major responsibility for caring for their children. It's also true that raising children creates economic dependency on men.

As a result many women who want custody of their children need help to get it and to prove they're worthy. Too often poor women, disabled women, native and immigrant women, and lesbians are judged unfit by Canadian courts.

Women need laws that match real life with all its inequalities. Women need the emotional support, recognition, and money to do what's best for their children and themselves.



THE ISSUE

CUSTODY AND THE EQUALITY GAP

The new "equality," as defined by the middle-class white men who dominate our legal system, has forced more women and children into poverty and helpless court-ordered submission to violence and abuse than even the most brutal male supremacist could have wished for.

Michele Landsberg, Introduction to "In The Name of The Fathers – The Story Behind Child Custody"

Family law has long been a focus of feminist work. We've tried to change attitudes and laws on issues such as divorce, maintenance and support, the division of matrimonial property, and responsibility for children.

In the 1960s and 70s feminists challenged society's traditional view of women as men's property. We asserted that women should be valued for more than bearing children and caring for them.

We worked for recognition of women's economic contribution to the family. We also challenged men to be more involved in childcare and in housework. We argued that children have rights too.

We pressed for laws that would reflect this new view of women, children and family life.

WE WANTED TO BE TREATED EQUALLY

Feminist strategies were based on the notion that men and women should be treated equally in our society. It seemed a simple demand. We did not want women to be treated as inferior or different. We wanted an end to laws that discriminated against women. We wanted no special treatment, just fairness.

Many of us hoped that, if the laws said women and men were equal, we would be. Many of us believed that changing the laws would change society and, as a result, liberate us.

It hasn't quite worked out that way.

WHAT WENT WRONG

Few issues show us what went wrong more clearly than the issue of custody.

Custody disputes are teaching us painful lessons about the gap between the theory of equality and women's real lives.

We are learning that the courts interpret equality in a very narrow way. They say that treating men and women equally means treating them the same. Within the court system, "equality" means that the law must be gender neutral. It must not make any distinction between how it deals with women or men.

In the court process, there is no recognition of power differences. Treating women as economic and social equals does not produce "equal" results in the courtroom.

In custody disputes, this interpretation of equality has resulted in women being treated as though we are "equal" to men economically and socially.

THE COURT'S "EQUALITY" DENIES THE FACTS

The court's uncritical application of equality denies the facts:

- Women earn considerably less than men.
- Women still bear almost all of the responsibility of caring for our children. The vast majority of men have not yet taken up housework or childcare as part of their work in the home.
- Motherhood directly limits a woman's earning capacity and opportunities in the workforce.

But the courts are ignoring these realities and as a result, women are losing custody.

Women are losing custody when we can't give our children the same standard of living our ex-husbands can provide.

Women's work of caring for children is undervalued while men have won shared custody by showing the slightest interest in spending more time with their children.

Women are losing custody when we don't conform to judges' white, middle-class stereotype of motherhood. Disabled women, women with different cultural values, and lesbians are often advised not to try for custody, let alone fight for it.

It's not unusual for a mother to be counselled not to say her husband beat her or abused their children. If she raises these issues during a custody dispute, the judge might think she's being unfair and vindictive.

For many women, it is a tremendous leap to challenge "equality" as a goal. We live in a society where equality assumed to be a noble ideal. But the experiences of women fighting for custody fly in the face of society's assumptions. Feminists must examine and change this ideal—no matter how good it sounds in theory—if it does not correspond to the experience of women when put into practice.

The following roundtable reveals how the legal process turns a blind eye to the real inequalities faced by women. The experiences of these women show how the current emphasis on "equality" is working against women.

THE ROUNDTABLE

SUPPORT GROUP ON CUSTODY AND ACCESS

The Support Group on Custody and Access was organized early in 1989 by two women working at Munroe House, a YWCA sponsored second-stage transition house for battered women. From the outset, the purpose of the group was twofold: to provide support for women facing custody and access struggles in the court system; and to have a place for organizing a political response to the treatment of women in the courts.

The group has operated on a drop-in basis. Women can come to the group at any time and there is no fixed membership. Women have, for the most part, attended the group when they have been in the midst of their own battles to get custody and/or restrict access to their children.

After almost a year of operation, group members have been assessing their work and looking for new ways to accomplish their purpose.

The roundtable consisted of the two original organizers of the group and several women who have participated in it.

The decision to organize the Support Group on Custody and Access came from women listening to the experience of women. One of the organizers of the group—a long-time transition house worker—reported that her concern about child custody and access began many years ago. She said:

> **Back in about 1974 or 75, when I was working at Transition House, I had a startling experience when a little boy was being told to kill his mother's boyfriend when he was on visits with his father. I was told that this was something that I should expect on visits. I was really shocked by that because it seemed to me very common sense that this was not the best thing for a child.**

This woman continued to see the problems that women were having concerning custody and access. Some problems were relatively minor, but many were extremely serious. In one woman's case, her children were murdered by her husband during an access visit, and she had been powerless to stop him.

When the group organizer moved from a crisis transition house to Munroe House, her involvement with the issue increased. Because women can live at this second-stage house for up to six months (as opposed to one month in a crisis transition house), she had the opportunity to see how fathers' behaviour affected mothers and children over a longer period of time:

> **We saw the emotional problems that they were having, the access visits, kids who had been kidnapped, fathers getting unsupervised access to kids who were locking themselves in their apartments because they didn't want to see their fathers, and their mothers being threatened with contempt of court if they didn't take the kids on the visits.**

During this time, she was involved in providing in-service training and workshops for court workers and did feel that she was having some effect. She was also becoming known in the wider community as someone interested in custody and access issues, and an increasing number of women contacted her. But because of the lack of support for women facing disputes over custody and access, she often felt "absolutely helpless." There was little she could offer the women who called.

This feeling of helplessness was echoed by the second group organizer, who also had come to work at Munroe House after experience in other transition houses. The helplessness was both a motivating factor and a disincentive to take on the support group project. She said:

When I worked in the transition houses, the worst calls were always the ex-residents who were having problems around their kids. It was the helplessness. With battering or the other things, I felt I could offer a resource or some ideas. But with that, it was like there was nothing there for them. How far does empathy go? So when we first talked about doing this group, I really didn't want to because it was such a hard thing to do because there's nothing to offer. But I knew that it was really needed, so we did it.

Starting the group was given an additional impetus in February 1989, when the Munroe House workers were asked to speak on a panel on custody and access issues with Susan Crean, author of a recent book on the subject. They agreed to participate, and decided to use the opportunity to announce the formation of the group. In addition to making this announcement, they used their time on the panel to describe what they had seen in their work:

What we talked about was that when battered women leave a relationship, often the only way that the batterer can maintain control is through the children. We also talked about how children are told by their fathers to pump their mothers for information, or told bad things about their mother. We just listed the things we had seen.

From the outset, the organizers saw the group as having two functions: to provide support to mothers facing custody and access problems, and to take political action on the issues.

At the same time, they knew they were charting new territory, and that the initial stages of their work would be a learning process as well:

When we started the group we were hoping to act as support. The other half was to be political. So initially we very specifically said we were going to divide the group in half. And that the first half would be support and that the second half would be some kind of political action. We had bunches of ideas, but nothing really concrete. We also wanted to learn, as part of that process.

However, the problem of how to mix the support function of the group with political action was a difficult one. The group was organized on a drop-in format, essential if it was to be available to women when they most needed it.

The primary motivation for women first coming to the group was to get support in their immediate situations. As one participant said:

I think the first part of it was the emotional support. I kept thinking that anytime now they were going to give me my kids, or more access to my kids, until we had a trial or something. The emotional support was the first reason I went. I just didn't know how large the whole struggle was.

Another woman said:

I was extremely frustrated with the court system. I was sending my child to a father who I thought was sexually abusing him. So it was absolutely excruciating at times. I didn't know where to turn. How to stop visits. So that was terribly painful.

Providing women with the information and support in their immediate situations was therefore the main focus of the group's work.

But at the same time, a political process was also beginning within the group. Through sharing their experiences, the women involved were able to identify common themes. They made the transition from seeing their situations as individual or isolated ones to recognizing them as examples of the way husbands, the legal system, and society as a whole undervalues motherhood and stacks the cards against women fighting for custody.

While some women expressed frustration that the group was as yet unable to take on this broader fight directly, they were also clear that this consciousness raising part of the group's work laid the base for future action by defining the problem as a political one.

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Husbands Were Using The Children As A Way Of Maintaining Control

One theme that quickly became evident was that the women's husbands were using their children as a means of continuing to exert control over their wives.

The tactics that these men were using to assert control are successful because they are prepared to manipulate their children, because the community and the court system refuse to believe that any father who takes an interest in his children has any ulterior motive, and because women cannot believe, at least initially, that their husbands will resort to such tactics.

One woman described how her husband actively undermined her to her one-and-a-half year old son:

Sometimes time my son's visits to his father were quite reasonable and he came back quite animated. Other times, he came back and he was screaming and yelling and hitting me, calling me all kinds of names, literally saying things like "Mummy, you're sick in the head. Daddy thinks you're sick in the head." Things like that.

The result of dealing with their father's outbursts means that children take responsibility for their fathers and work to protect them. Another mother said:

These kids end up taking responsibility completely for the father. So my son says, "My dad will be hurt if that happens. My dad will be angry if that happens, and I have to take care of my dad." Kids end up saying, "Yes, of course I want to be with my dad half the time...I want justice."

I mean, my son even says words like "justice" that I never even knew that he knew. And he tells me that "if we're just fair," my husband's going to be a nice guy. So he won't even tell a custody and access worker that he wants to be with his mum, even though he'll crawl into bed and tell me so. But this is how we're going to have to work it out. My son takes responsibility for the whole situation.

Women discover that they have very little ability to protect their children from such manipulation, because the community and the courts do not want to believe it is happening. Their husbands actively promote their own good image as a father, often as the expense of the mother:

My husband actually went to the family doctor and told him that because of what I had done to him he was financially in dire straits. He told the doctor that he was having to look after these kids and he didn't have enough money to buy good food for them and they were having health problems because he didn't have enough money to buy food.

In the meantime, he's taking a trip to New York and a Christmas ski vacation. He left me with the kids, and no food, no presents, or anything for Christmas. Just tons of stuff like that he set up. He took flowers to all the daycare workers, and then subpoened them to testify in court for him.

The women at the roundtable described how the courts, too, believe the fathers' claims, and do not question either their motivation or their behaviour. While women have to jump through hoops to prove their adequacy as mothers, fathers are seen as beyond criticism:

My lawyer told me that I should get a job because I had to prove that I could economically support the children. And yet nobody questioned my husband's ability to support the children. On an emotional level, that really disturbed me.

I had been taking the children to counselling for the last year. My husband had refused to be involved, had refused to take the children to deal with their emotional difficulties. In fact, he said that they didn't even have any. Yet there was no question of his ability to support the children's emotional needs. There weren't any questions asked of him at all.

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COURTS IGNORE POWER DIFFERENCES

The women explained that the contrast between the intense scrutiny applied to mothers and the almost complete lack of questioning of fathers is reinforced by the court system's lack of recognition of the power differences between men and women throughout the process.

Nowhere is this more clear than in mediation:

What's happening in terms of custody and access reports now is that they're forcing women into mediation for four sessions before they start the custody and access report. That's a new policy. You don't have to do it, but you *have* to do it. Otherwise, they'll go into court and say, "she's not co-operating." So I

went to mediation...and I gave away a lot of my power.

The role of mediators is to get an agreement between the woman and man involved. But approaching mediation without recognizing the power differences between men and women, and the physical and emotional abuse that women often suffer before and during marriage breakdown, means that what is really happening to women and their children is invisible in the process:

The judge demanded mediation. The day before we went to court, my husband assaulted me when he was picking up the children.

In the early stages I had been saying that I was sure we could work out the joint custody agreement. But every time the court case would come up he would play on my emotional stuff. Break down my self-esteem and all that. And the physical abuse happened when that wasn't working.

So we went into mediation, and although I knew that for me to challenge his ex parte sole custody order was a major thing for me to do, there was no way a joint custody agreement was going to work out with the physical abuse and everything that was going on.

This woman described how she had to challenge the advice of her lawyer, the "neutral" stance of the mediator, and her husband's lies. She continued:

My lawyer was saying, "You have to be the more reasonable. If you come from the strategy of being the more reasonable, the judge is not going to give you less access than you have already. If you just sound like you're reasonable." But in the end when the physical abuse started happening, I just said, "No. There's no way."

The kids will always be the centre for my husband getting control and basically trying to destroy my life and intimidate me and all the rest of it... We would sit in mediation, and he'd look at the mediator and say, "I'm looking you right in the face and I'm telling you I didn't touch her."

The women at the roundtable emphasized that the standard of success for mediators is achieving a custody and access "agreement" without a custody and access report. In the jargon of the courts this is called "getting a Section One."

One of the women commented that mediators who can get a Section One are valued in the system, regardless of whether the agreements they mediate reflect the best interests of women and their children:

The mediator I had was just incredible. She gets agreements whether they're good or bad. She's only done one custody and access report in four or five years. She's gotten everyone to sign a Section One. And she's really proud of that. And I said, "That just sounds really scary to me," and "How do these women feel about signing?" She said, "Oh, wonderful. Everything's wonderful."

Women often experience mediation as a coercive process, because of the power imbalance between men and women, and because the mediator has considerable power as well. There is pressure on women to "co-operate" with the mediator in the mediation process:

So you're in there and you know this person's going to be doing a custody and access report, so you can't show your anger. Plus, if you're the one who blocks it, you're also causing them a failure, because they haven't got the agreement.

Women involved in custody and access have experienced the power imbalances. Men have more power than women, mediators have power over women, and the court system as a whole has the ultimate power.

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"Equality" Is Being Used Against Women

The women in the group have become very aware that in the court process there is no recognition of the power differences between men and women. On the contrary, the current emphasis is on "equality." But "equality" does not mean ensuring that the interests of women and children are adequately represented.

In fact, the court system is using the idea of equality against women. One woman described

the attitude of the court as, "You wanted equality, you've got it. Now you lose your kids."

The court system turns a blind eye to the real inequalities faced by women and children in pretending that those inequalities do not exist:

For some reason the judicial system has said, "Okay, women have equality," but there's no question about the economic equality, the social equality, anything.

I really feel for women of different cultures that are living in Canada and having decisions made about their life based on western ideas of men's and women's relationship. There were a couple of women in the group who were affected by this and I felt for them, I really did. Because there's no consideration of different ethnic cultures at all.

In addition to this lack of acknowledgement of economic, social and cultural inequality, the court's uncritical application of equality pays little attention to who has been the primary parent before marriage breakdown. Both the courts and other professionals look at the family only from the moment of separation and do not consider that in the vast majority of cases mothers are still the primary parent.

One woman noted that the court did not challenge her husband's claim to be an equal parent, despite the fact that it was simply not true.

The result of the arbitrary use of the idea of equality in the courts is that women can't win:

There's an amazing double bind. The kids are screwed up because the mother's too bonded or she's too independent, or neglectful. She's either not close or she's too close. She has to be cool but not too cool, not hysterical but caring enough... On the other hand, it doesn't matter what he's done, whether he's a drunk, whether he batters her, whether he sells coke, whether he drunk drives with the kids in the car, it just doesn't count.

She has to be co-operative, but if she's too co-operative then it negates any of her concerns for sexual or physical abuse. They will say, "Well, if you were concerned about the child's safety, why did you allow the child to go with the father?" But if she doesn't, then she's in trouble because she's not co-operating.

The cards are stacked. They're really stacked bad.

The result is that women must walk a fine line in presenting their cases to the court system. The women agreed that it was very important to be careful what they say because anything can and will be used against them. Knowing how to play the system is more important that speaking the truth.

But understanding the need to manipulate the system and to have a well thought out plan of action is very difficult for women in the midst of custody and access fights. First, many women expect that the system (and their husbands) will be "fair" and that a reasonable approach will work.

Often women do not have the information to allow them to make the choices that will put their case in the best possible light. Decisions women make from the beginning often have disastrous effects further down the line.

Furthermore, it is very difficult for women to "play the system" in the midst of considerable emotional turmoil. The breakdown of a relationship is never easy. If physical and/or emotional abuse is there, the woman's confidence is even more undermined.

Women fighting for custody of their children—like all mothers—have some self-doubt over their abilities. But there is no safe place to express these doubts. The court system is all too ready to use them, and society as a whole continues to promote the ideal that mothers must be perfect to be "good" mothers at all:

I think it's really important to take the taboo of not being a perfect mother out of the closet. It's not safe to talk about that, especially if you're doing custody and access. It's not safe for anybody to talk about it. We're all supposed to be right off Sesame Street.

In addition to facing the pressure to be perfect, women fighting for custody also face the fear that if anyone finds out they are not perfect after all, they will lose their children. One woman spoke of going to a counsellor to help her through the emotional crisis she was facing:

I went through the feeling of "Oh God, somebody's going to find this out and they're going to take my kids away now because I've told someone." There's always that feeling of not being able to trust anybody or anything.

This isolation can spill over into virtually every part of a woman's life during this time:

I was also thinking, wouldn't it be nice to have a place to go where you could also socialize and feel like a normal person. Because the thing that was really overwhelming for me was losing my children and nobody being able to relate to me as a normal person. Everybody was so afraid of my pain and my loss that I couldn't even go to a social gathering because people would steer any which way rather than have to talk to me, because they couldn't cope with what was happening in my life.

In such cases, women's isolation is complete. The court system doesn't hear them. They must censor their words in mediation for fear of having those words used against them. Seeking help in crisis is frightening. Self-doubt is a taboo subject. And the rest of the world often does not want to see what is happening.

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Support Is Crucial For Women Facing Custody And Access Fights

For all of these reasons, women agreed that the drop-in support group is a crucial place for women facing custody and access fights. Even if they only attend sporadically, the knowledge that there is some place to go provides an important lifeline for some women:

I've gone to the group maybe five times. However, if the group wasn't there, I'd fall apart. It's the idea of knowing that there is a place there and the phone contact is really important. Knowing that the group is there is what's really important, that there is a safe place.

Another important role for the group is in providing information on how to deal with the system. One woman described how learning to use the words that the system wants to hear makes a real difference:

I think for me the most supportive thing about the group is the whole thing of sitting around just discussing language and what you say and what you don't say...

You don't say to your husband, "You can't see your child today because I think you sexually abused him." You just don't. Because if you do it, you're going to pay in court for that. And women don't know that.

You learn that you don't talk about "me," you talk about "the best interest of the child." You never mention "me."

It makes so much difference when you're using a different language. They don't want to hear he's abusive. They don't want to hear he's a jerk or never worked. Nobody cares.

The experiences of women in the group confirm that the information and support provided by the group are extremely important. In the immediate sense, this is what women need—the knowledge that there is someplace to go, and somewhere to get information on how to manoeuvre in the court system.

At the same time, it is difficult to combine responding to women's immediate needs with the longer term goal of the group, which is to make changes in the system that will serve women's interests.

Women who are in the midst of emotional crisis while fighting for custody or access do not have the energy to do political work as well—no matter how clearly they see the issues. Furthermore, they are afraid of "stepping out of line" for fear that it will damage their position with the court.

Others are afraid of different kinds of retaliation:

I'm still angry. And I'm afraid. I daren't speak out, or go to the newspaper, or whatever, because I'm on welfare. And I could get cut off just like that. My survival is at stake. Most women's survival is at stake. This is why we're so scared.

Finally, the need for women to tell the court system what it wants to hear is precisely the opposite of what is needed to change the system.

Change can only come about when women can speak the truth and openly challenge the system. Women in the middle of a fight for their children cannot afford to take this risk.

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Support And Political Action: Complementary Strategies

It is understandable that the group had difficulty combining its two strategies of providing immediate support and initiating political action.

One woman said that she could now see that having two groups–one to provide the immediate information and support to women in the midst of a crisis and a second to do ongoing political work–might be more effective. Women could then move from personal support to political action as their own circumstances changed.

The group is now considering future directions for its work. It is likely that building the support and political action strategies can best proceed in a parallel, mutually beneficial way. Support for women is facilitated by the political work of educating women more broadly and organizing for changes that will make women's experience less agonizing. In turn, the political work is kept on course by the real life experiences of women who have struggled for the right to their children.

One woman said that her experience had impressed upon her that motherhood doesn't really count for anything in the courts. Through a combination of mutual support and political action, it may be possible to make mothers count—in the courts and in the world.

LEARNING FROM OUR EXPERIENCE

CUSTODY LAW

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LEGAL "EQUALITY" WORKS AGAINST WOMEN FIGHTING FOR CUSTODY

When we look at laws we need to focus on how they relate to women's real lives, not on how they relate to theories of how life **ought** to be. The current laws governing custody assume an equality between women and men that does not exist.

To assess laws governing the family, we have to grapple with some difficult questions:

- Laws that ignore the differences between women and men only add to women's oppression. But how do we avoid entrenching in law the differences that have been used as excuses for keeping women down and maintaining women's inequality?
- Until we achieve sexual equality in our society, we need laws that give women and children some protection against abuse. But, protection is not the ultimate goal. How do ensure that the struggle is not limited to protective measures while at the same time insisting that laws must take into account the reality of sexual inequality and women's subordination?

Women need strategies to change the interpretations of equality that are hurting women and children. We need:

- to find ways to give women practical and emotional support in fighting custody disputes and in living with the results
- to fight for a national system of high quality childcare and an end to wage discrimination
- to educate judges and lawyers about what life is really like for women and children
- to combat the notion that all women are white and heterosexual.

Finally, we need to work for family laws that reflect real life, not theories and stereotypes.

To evaluate a specific approach to custody, we might ask the following questions:

1. Does it respect women's work in caring for children without binding women to that role? One way of dealing with this concern may be to insist on the **"primary caregiver presumption"** in deciding custody. This would mean that custody goes to the parent—male or female—who has been most involved in caring for the child(ren) unless there is evidence of abuse or neglect. Joint custody should only be considered when shared parenting has already existed and both parents have demonstrated they can handle it.
2. Are allegations of **wife assault and child sexual abuse** treated seriously whenever they arise? A man who abuses his wife or children is an **"unfit parent."** Women and children must be believed.
3. Do the support services recognize the right of women to live lives that don't conform to the dominant **stereotype of motherhood?**

Custody disputes are painful for the adults and children involved. Often they need and want help to get through the process. Mediation and access services need to be developed in consultation with workers from feminist services. Moreover, mediation needs to be truly voluntary. Women should not be compelled to "negotiate" in a situation where they have little power.

Part Two:

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

FOUR STEPS TO A STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

When feminists are working for change, the need to plan a strategy often seems an unaffordable luxury. There is so little time and so much to do. Planning a strategy can also seem complicated, because of the jargon that is often used in political organizing.

However, planning a strategy that will best serve our interests is really only a matter of asking and answering a series of questions. These are questions about our lives, about what we want to change, and how we want to make those changes.

Asking these questions will make our work more effective, and will help ensure we keep control of our issues from our point of view.

It will also help us to set priorities for what we want to do, and to let go of ideas that are less effective or impossible. Finally, it will encourage us to make the decisions in a systematic way.

In this section we outline four steps to a strategy for change:

- Grounding the issue
- Defining the issue
- Developing the strategy
- Preparing for the results.

We offer some questions you can use to guide the discussion through each step. We follow this with a "how to do it" section, which describes techniques we have found useful in facilitating the discussion.

We have illustrated these "how to's" with examples from four issues. Three of these are the issues that we have looked at in some detail in the first section of this book: wage discrimination, wife assault and custody law. The fourth issue is that of cutbacks to funding of women's centres and other organizations. We have included it because it has been front and centre on the agenda of women's groups as we worked on this project, and because it provides a good example of how the four steps can be used in a crisis situation.

We hope you'll try these "how to" techniques. We have found that these methods can help ensure that everyone participates, and that the discussion is not dominated by a few women who have the most experience in these kinds of discussions.

In our experience, these "how to" techniques make the discussion more interesting, and often bring out points that we might otherwise have overlooked.

Whether you use the "how to" techniques or just use the questions provided in the four steps as a discussion outline, keep a record of your results as you go. (You're going to need lots of flip chart paper.)

Planning a strategy does take time. But it is time well spent. Your work will be more effective because it has been planned. The planning process itself encourages more collective responsibility for the work.

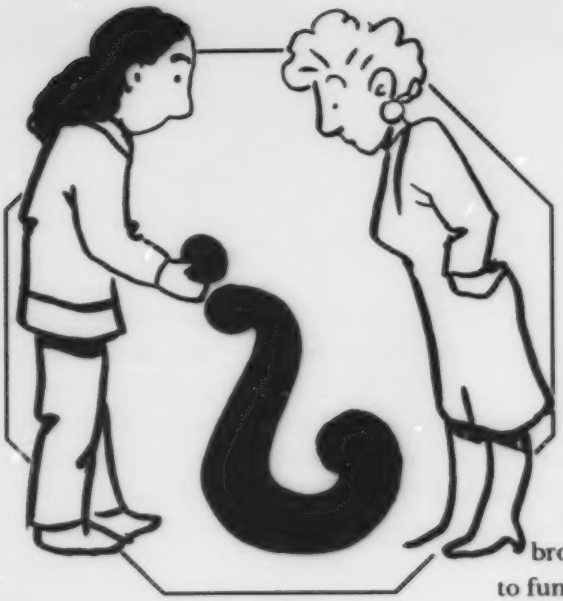
Having an overall plan can help individual women to see how their work fits. And it helps you to avoid missing things that might lead to mistakes and frustration down the road. In the long run, you will save time and energy because of your planning.

We suggest that you allocate at least three hours for each step. This can be done over a weekend, on two separate full days, or in a series of evening meetings. Groups that have tried to shorten this time-frame have found it difficult.

At the end of this section, we provide a Strategy Checklist to record the results of your discussions.

When you have completed the four steps, you will have a strategy that:

- has been clearly thought through
- is based on women's experience
- develops goals and demands out of that experience
- provides a plan for follow-up and evaluation.



STEP 1

GROUNDING THE ISSUE

The first step is to build a complete picture of the issue and how it affects us as women. Just start with the issue that your group wants to work on. It can be as broad as violence against women or as specific as cutbacks to funding of women's groups.

Too often, women are told what will help us solve our problems—by government, by the media, by the "experts." The purpose of asking these questions is to ground the issue in women's experience. You can call the process **grounding the issue**.

What's happening to us?

It's important to have a description of the concrete ways women experience the problem. Nobody knows better than women ourselves how we experience a specific issue.

What's affecting our lives?

Other things in our lives may affect how we deal with a specific issue. Lots of things affect us—everything from the neighborhood we live in, to the media, the economy, the government and so on. All of these things make up the **context** of the issue.

Who are we? Who's not here?

Issues affect different women differently. This seems obvious, but is important that we be clear about who we are when we are defining the issue. This can also be called our **base**.

Understanding that there are other women who have a stake in the issue can help us figure out who we might work with, and how we could make contact with these women.

How did we get here?

The past is important. It helps us understand why things are the way they are, and what has been tried before.

Think about how the issue has developed over time, what action (good or bad) has been taken by governments or others on the issue, and what women have done in the past to try to change things.

This is the **history** of the issue.

We go through three exercises here. They are:

- **Drawing our experience**
- **List: Who's here? Who's not here?**
- **Historical timeline**

Drawing our experience

We've found that drawing our experience is a very useful tool for answering the first two questions in this step: What's happening to us? What's affecting our lives?

Drawing our experience is simply a way of facilitating and recording discussion. It is a way to involve women who are less comfortable with long discussions and women whose first language is not the language of the group.

Drawing allows us to see the relationships between various parts of our lives. It provides a visual record of our description of the issue that can be looked at over and over. And it's fun to do.

You might find some resistance at first to the idea of doing a drawing. Many women feel they "can't draw." Stress that the drawing exercise is **not** meant to produce a work of art. We have found that once a group gets over its initial hesitation everyone relaxes and gets into it. You can ask one group member to do the drawing while the others take part in the discussion which builds the picture.

It might be useful to decide on some symbols to use in advance.

Now's a good time to take a look at the two drawing exercises we have included. You can see that any symbols can work. They just have to make sense to the women in the group.

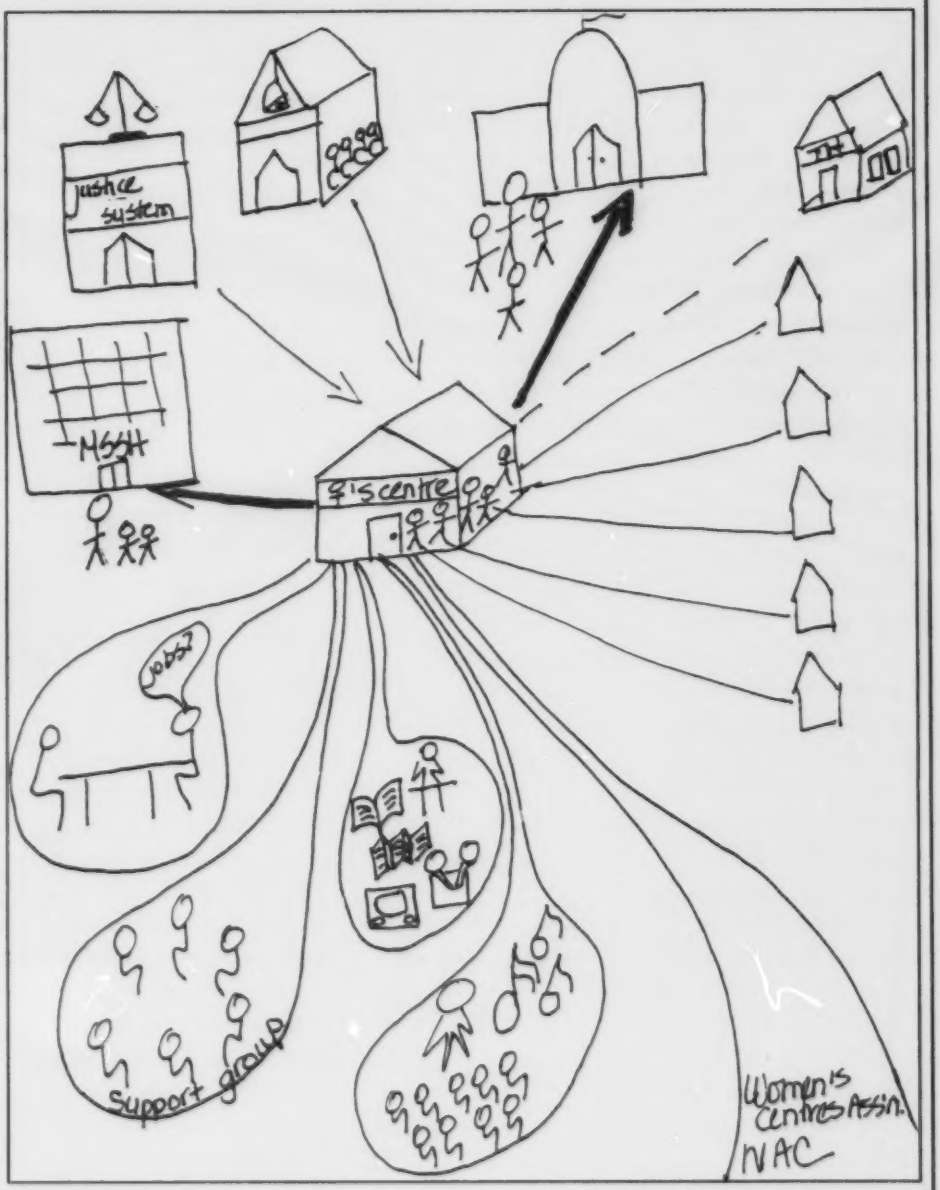
When you're ready to begin

Begin by asking the most basic question you can about the issue and how women experience it. Focus on what women experience or do. For example, What is the experience we have had in fighting for custody of our children? What kinds of work do we do in our community and how much are we paid for it? In illustration #1 the group working on the issue of funding for women's centre used the question, What do women's centres do?

- Put the women in the group in the middle of the drawing. If everyone is already part of an established group, the group can go in the middle. If not, just draw each woman.

  Then let each woman tell how the issue affects her, directly or indirectly.
- Draw in all the things that affect her experiences. These could include institutions such as the courts or the education system, employers, family members—whatever's relevant to the problem at hand.
- Draw lines and arrows to show how things are connected, and barriers women can't cross.

Drawing our experience: funding for women's centres



A group working on the issue of funding cutbacks to women's centres might use the **drawing our experience** technique to answer the question, **What do women's centres do?** (This is a more specific version of the first question, **What's happening to us?**)

This drawing shows the complexity of experience of women's centres. Lines connecting the individual houses on the right of the centre show how first of all, women's centres provide a focal point for women to gather to address mutual concerns.

In the bottom of the drawing, the circled symbols represent programmes that the centre offers: (LtoR) information and referral on job training, a support group for sexual abuse survivors, educational resources on women's issues, and women's cultural events.

Heavy arrows in the upper half of the drawing represent the centre's role as an advocate, both for individual women with the social services ministry, and for women as a group at various levels of government.

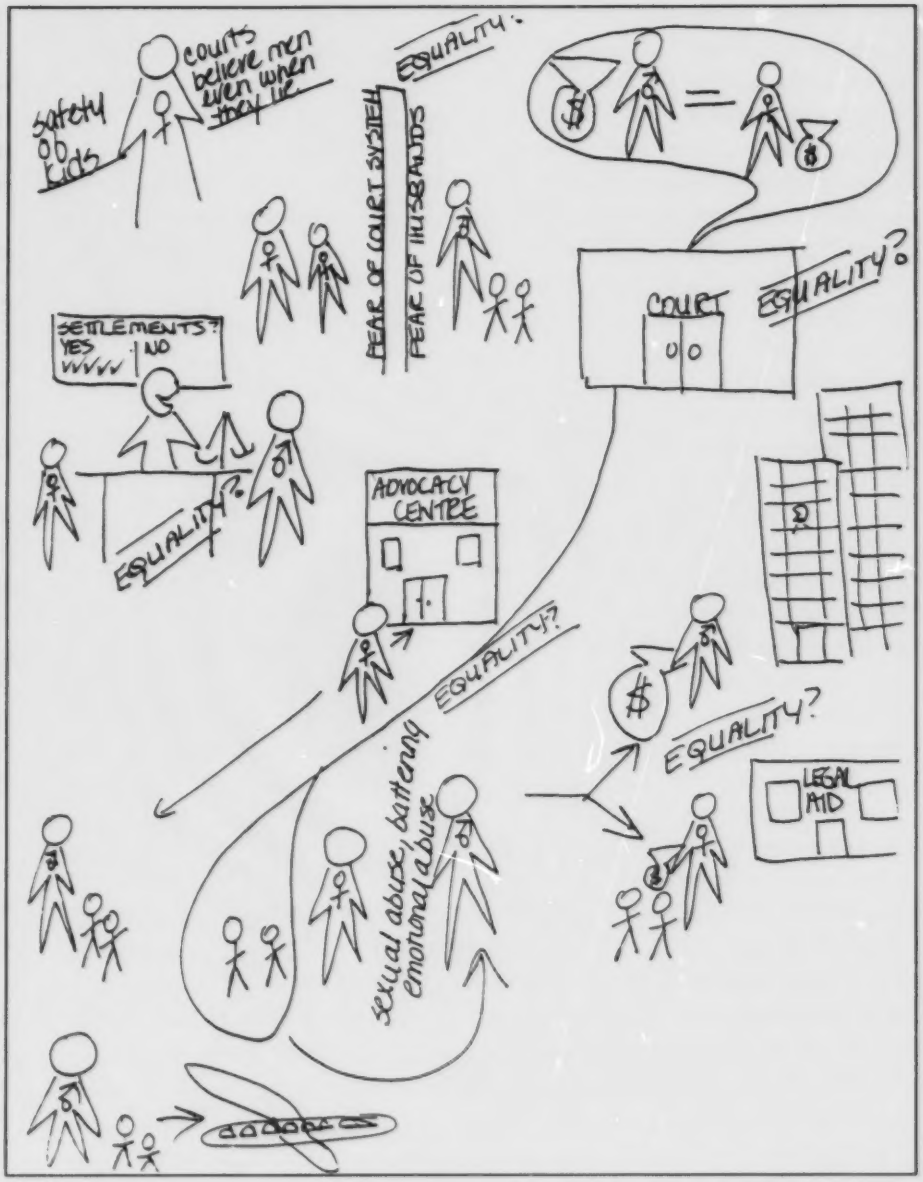
Arrows leading into the centre demonstrate how other institutions call on the centre for services and advice.

The broken line to a transition house represents how women's programmes that are now independent were organized initially by the centre.

Finally, the road leading to the Women's Centres Association and the National Action Council on the Status of Women (NAC) represents the centre's links with the women's movement regionally and nationally.

Developing this overview of what the centre actually does provides a defence against narrow definitions (e.g. women's centres are only direct service groups). The overview makes visible the diversity and importance of the centre's work.

Drawing our experience: custody law



A support group for women fighting for custody might create this drawing based on the question, **What are the experiences of women fighting for custody?**

The woman in the middle of the drawing is approaching the advocacy centre alone. She represents the fact that the support group is for women who are fighting custody decisions.

The drawing in the bottom left represent fathers who abscond with the children, to other provinces and other countries. Above and slightly to the right is a drawing to suggest that women who try to protect their children from sexual, physical or emotional abuse are sometimes portrayed as "vindictive" and therefore lose custody.

Symbols in the upper right show the court process: the man with the bigger money bag faces the woman with the smaller money bag, but an equals sign indicates that the process assumes equality.

In the centre and lower right we see the man and woman heading off to their respective lawyers: the man goes to the office tower while the woman goes to legal aid.

By looking at this drawing, the support group would be better able to identify the places where the system assumes equality between women and men, and where that assumption is used against women.

Remind the group: it's our perspective that we want to work from. It's our drawing of our experience, so put in everything we know.

When the drawing is complete, you should be able to answer the questions, **What's happening to us?** and **What's our life like?**

List: Who's here? Who's not here?

The way to answer the third question, Who are we? Who's not here? is to look at the drawing and ask, Who's here? Who's not here?

- List the answers on a fresh sheet of paper. You might want to draw a line down the middle of the flip chart and write, **Who's here?** on one side of the line and, **Who's not here?** on the other.

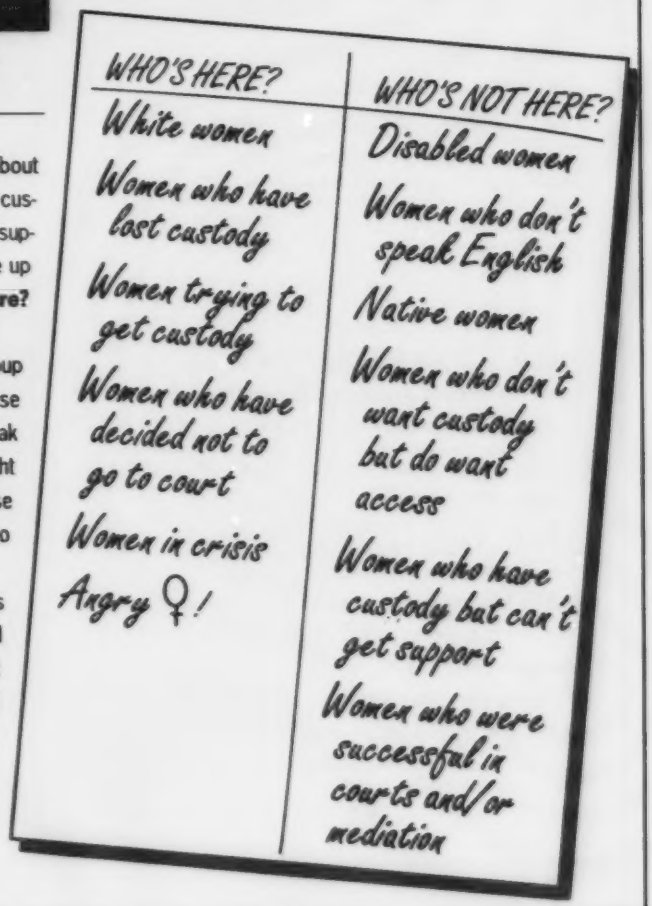
It's important to find out who's not here. If, for example, we are working on the issue of wage discrimination, but the group includes few (or no) women who are in clerical, service and sales jobs, we are excluding the perspective of the majority of women affected by the issue. We cannot assume we know what they think!

List: Who's here? Who's not here?

Using the drawing about women's experience in custody issues, the custody support group might come up with this list of **Who's here? and Who's not here?**

The list helps the group to be clearer about whose experience they can speak from, who they might reach out to, and whose concerns they need to know more about.

The list also illustrates how strategies around custody interconnect with those concerned with access and child support.


WHO'S HERE?
White women
Women who have lost custody
Women trying to get custody
Women who have decided not to go to court
Women in crisis
Angry ♀!
WHO'S NOT HERE?
Disabled women
Women who don't speak English
Native women
Women who don't want custody but do want access
Women who have custody but can't get support
Women who were successful in courts and/or mediation

Historical timeline: wife battering and the erosion of feminist services

After drawing a picture and discussing, **What's happening to us on the issue of wife battering?**, a group might decide that feminists face the following major problems:

- increasing control of services by professionals and institutions
- erosion of feminist services
- not enough political action on the issue by women's groups.

The group might then piece together this historical timeline to show how these problems have developed.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE	WOMEN'S MOVEMENT
	– ***1970*** *– early women's movement work thru CR, women's centres exposes rape, battering, violence*
	– *TH group lobbies for $ for house*
	– ***1973*** *– TH opens as part of Ministry – only TH that is part of gov't services – hiring policy favours life experience NOT degrees in counselling, soc. work*
	– *gov't policy req. job descriptions for TH workers—beginning of hierarchy*
– ***1976*** *– United Way does studies on wife battering.*	
– ***1977***–*Conference on "Family Violence"*	
– *more professionals take on issue*	– ***1979*** *– 1st 2nd stage TH*
	– *1979 – TH's workers overloaded, professionals too conservative – more public ed. & gps. for women needed – SUPPORT & EDUCATION GP. formed*
	– *trend to specialization – i.e. TH's limited by funding, so not seen as activist*
– ***1980*** *– CACSW publishes "The Vicious Circle"*	
– *gov'ts fund programmes for battered women other than feminist–safe homes*	– *Provincial Ass'n tries to accommodate all services for battered women, feminst or not*
– ***1982*** *– Parliamentary hearings – MP's laugh in House of Commons*	
– ***1983*** *– "restraint" – social service cutbacks put more pressure on voluntary org's*	– ***1983*** *– because of "restraint", groups more overloaded, less able to do political work, more afraid of "rocking the boat"*
– *more institutionally based programmes (eg. police based witness services) compete for ownership of issue*	– ***1984*** *– TH privatized, women occupy house for 9 months*
– *funding for this continues, but less prov. & fed. $ for feminist educ. & political work*	– ***1985*** *– TH turned over to church group*
	– ***1987*** *– increased funding for indiv. service, less for education, none for political work – SUPPORT & EDUC. GP. shifts focus*
	– *feminists work with women from various groups to establish feminst, multi-ethnic TH*
	– ***1990*** *– lobbying for feminist, multi-ethnic TH & advocacy centre continues*

Historical timeline

To answer the question, How did we get here?, we recommend a technique called the historical timeline.

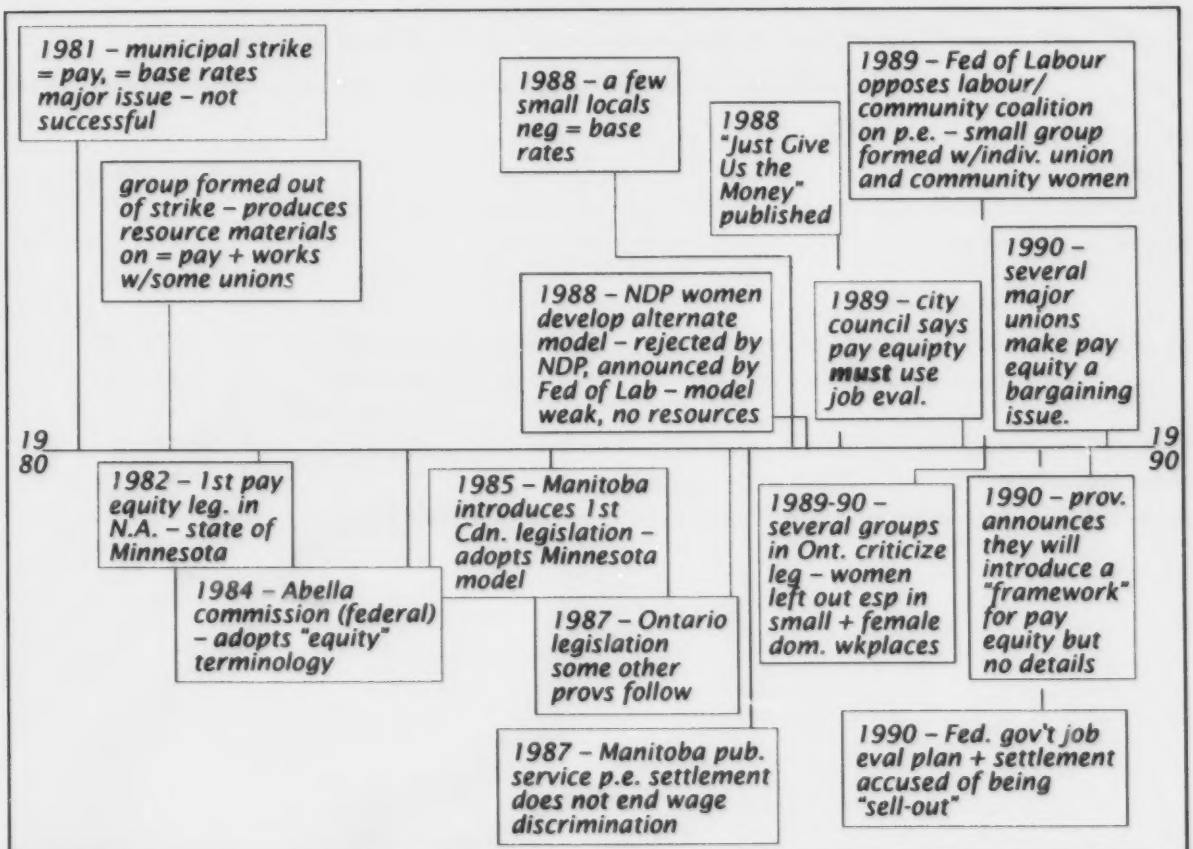
The **historical timeline** allows participants to outline what has happened to get the issue to where it is now. It is important to include both what external groups have done and what your group has done. You might choose two time frames to look at—a longer time frame to outline general progress on the issue and a shorter one to look in more detail at recent events, especially in your own community.

The historical timelines we have included deal with the cutbacks in women's centre funding and wage discrimination. They present two ways of doing a timeline. (See illustrations #s 4 & 5)

When you're ready to begin

- Draw a long horizontal or vertical line in the middle of the paper. Divide the line into time periods. You might want to use months or years, depending on the time frame you are looking at.

  If you're using a horizontal line, you might want to put what women have done above the line and what others (governments, media etc) have done


1981 – municipal strike = pay, = base rates major issue – not successful
group formed out of strike – produces resource materials on = pay + works w/some unions
1988 – a few small locals neg = base rates
1988 "Just Give Us the Money" published
1989 – Fed of Labour opposes labour/ community coalition on p.e. – small group formed w/indiv. union and community women
1988 – NDP women develop alternate model – rejected by NDP, announced by Fed of Lab – model weak, no resources
1989 – city council says pay equipty must use job eval.
1990 – several major unions make pay equity a bargaining issue.
19 80
19 90
1982 – 1st pay equity leg. in N.A. – state of Minnesota
1984 – Abella commission (federal) – adopts "equity" terminology
1985 – Manitoba introduces 1st Cdn. legislation – adopts Minnesota model
1987 – Ontario legislation some other provs follow
1987 – Manitoba pub. service p.e. settlement does not end wage discrimination
1989-90 – several groups in Ont. criticize leg – women left out esp in small + female dom. wkplaces
1990 – prov. announces they will introduce a "framework" for pay equity but no details
1990 – Fed. gov't job eval plan + settlement accused of being "sell-out"

Historical timeline: wage discrimination	A group working on the issue of wage discrimination might create this timeline of events	since 1980. Since most of the activity on this issue has been in the late 1980s, the group	might decide to do a second timeline, to look at recent developments in more detail.

below the line. If you're using a vertical line, you might want to put women on the left and government on the right.

- Participants fill in the events in the time slots.

When the historical timeline is as complete as you can make it, the group may see "holes" in the history. You may want to fill in the holes by searching out the needed information.

You can also identify major trends or turning points on the issue. You can see when governments or professionals have co-opted or controlled the issues, or when the actions of women's groups have resulted in a significant gain for women.

These things become much easier to see when everything is laid out along the line.

SUMMARY

At the end of Step 1 you know:

- how women experience the problem
- what has been done about it in the past, and by whom.

This puts the group on good ground to move along to Step 2 - defining the issue.

STEP 2

DEFINING THE ISSUE

Once we have a clear description of our experience, who we are and how we got there, we can begin to develop the issue, grounded on that knowledge.

We go about this by asking four questions.

Why is this happening?

Understanding why something is happening is crucial to figuring out the best way to change it. This is also called **analysis**.

What do women need?

Raising a concern is not enough. We need to be clear about what will do the most good. While we often look to changing laws as a way to work on an issue, legislative reform is not always the only or the best way to deliver what women most need. Figuring out what women most need is an important step in defining the issue.

What are our assumptions?

Assumptions about an issue are bottom-line statements about what we know to be true about an issue. They provide a way of keeping on track.

What do we want to change? In the long term? In the short term?

We need to know what we want in the long term in order to be sure that short-term reforms help us get where we want to go. Another way of saying this is that we need to be clear about our long-term **goals** and our short-term **objectives**.

HOW TO DO IT

In this step we describe the following exercises:

- **Web chart**
- **Brainstorming**

Web chart

You can use a web chart to answer the first question in this step, Why is this happening?

Because you've completed Step One, you already have a description of the problem based on women's experience. That's what goes in the centre of the "web." But problems have causes, and those causes have causes, and this is what the **web chart** is designed to capture.

By understanding what's behind the problem, we can avoid the quick-fix band-aid solutions that will do little to actually change the conditions that caused the problem in the first place.

Before you start, you'll probably want to have a look at the web charts on custody and on cutbacks in funding (illustrations #s 6 & 7).

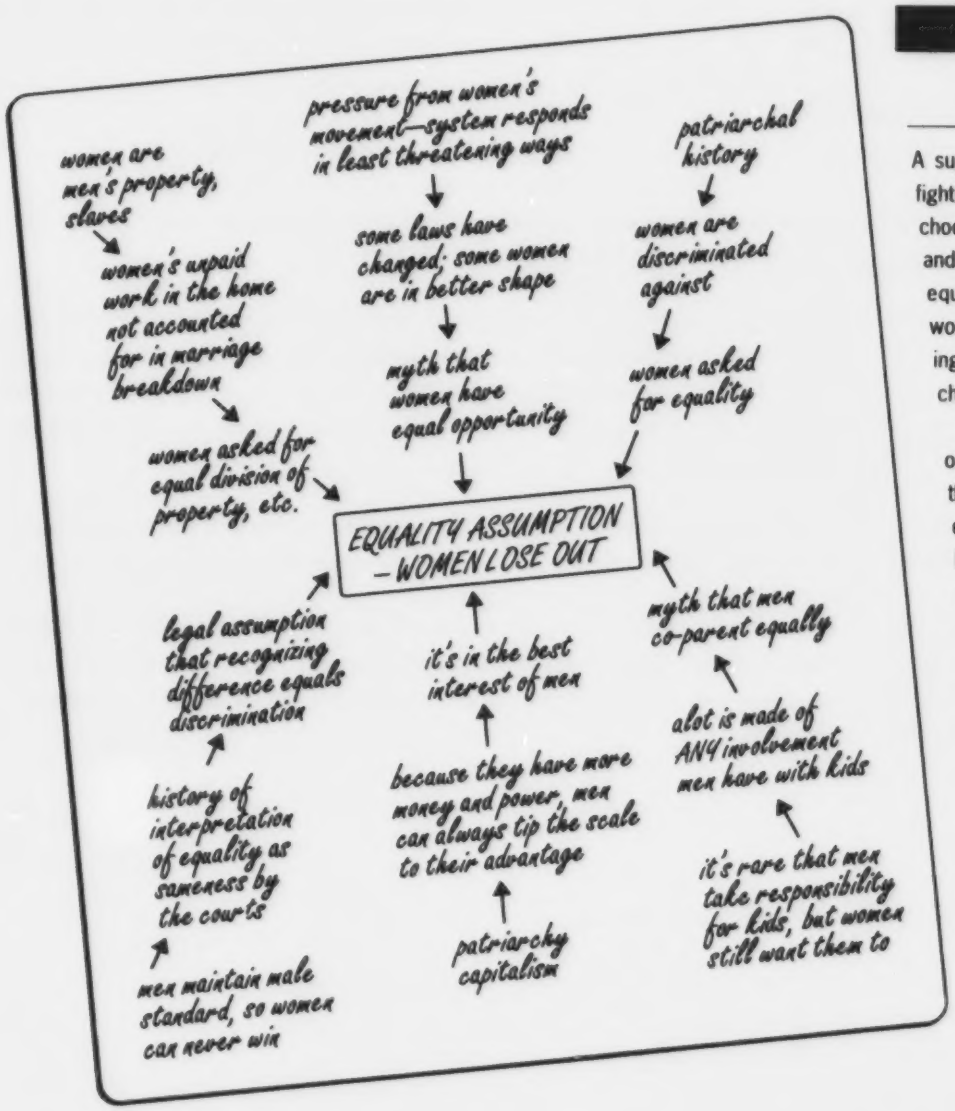

women are men's property, slaves
women's unpaid work in the home not accounted for in marriage breakdown
women asked for equal division of property, etc.
pressure from women's movement—system responds in least threatening ways
some laws have changed; some women are in better shape
myth that women have equal opportunity
patriarchal history
women are discriminated against
women asked for equality
EQUALITY ASSUMPTION —WOMEN LOSE OUT
legal assumption that recognizing difference equals discrimination
history of interpretation of equality as sameness by the courts
men maintain male standard, so women can never win
it's in the best interest of men
because they have more money and power, men can always tip the scale to their advantage
patriarchy capitalism
myth that men co-parent equally
alot is made of ANY involvement men have with kids
it's rare that men take responsibility for kids, but women still want them to

ILLUSTRATION #6

Web chart: custody law

A support group for women fighting for custody might choose the fact that the legal and social assumption of equality can mean that women lose out when fighting for custody of their children.

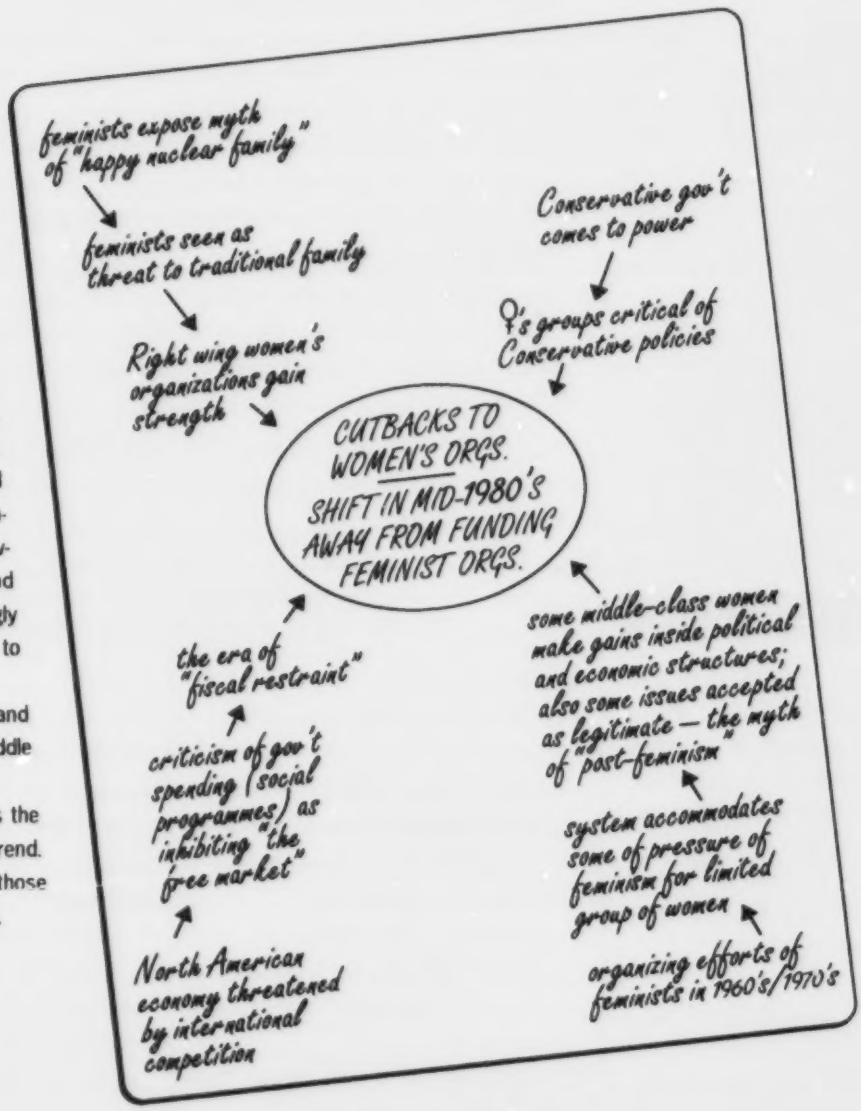
The group is aware that our courts now assume that women and men have equal rights and responsibilities. The legal system does not take into account the social and economic inequalities that continue to exist between women and men.

At the middle of the chart is a brief statement of the problem as women experience it: the equality assumption means women lose out.

When you're ready to begin

- In the middle of a large sheet of paper, write a brief statement of the problem as women experience it.
- The group describes the problem's immediate causes. Put these in a circle around the web.
- The group then describes causes of the causes. Put these in a second, wider circle around the web.
- The group then describes third and even fourth levels of causes until the complete picture emerges.

We've been surprised at how effective the web chart has been in providing an analysis of the problem. Even when we've thought we already knew why a problem existed, we've learned something new. And that means we have a deeper analysis that will help us stay on track.


feminists expose myth of "happy nuclear family"
feminists seen as threat to traditional family
Right wing women's organizations gain strength
Conservative gov't comes to power
Q's groups critical of Conservative policies
CUTBACKS TO WOMEN'S ORGS.
SHIFT IN MID-1980's AWAY FROM FUNDING FEMINIST ORGS.
some middle-class women make gains inside political and economic structures; also some issues accepted as legitimate — the myth of "post-feminism"
system accommodates some of pressure of feminism for limited group of women
organizing efforts of feminists in 1960's/1970's
the era of "fiscal restraint"
criticism of gov't spending (social programmes) as inhibiting "the free market"
North American economy threatened by international competition

Web chart:
Funding for women's centres

This web chart provides one example of how the funding cutbacks to women's centres can be traced to more basic causes. Through an historical timeline, the cuts were connected to a general shift in government policies nationally and provincially that have increasingly restricted and reduced funds to women's groups.

The most recent cutbacks and this shift were placed in the middle of the web.

The inner circles expresses the immediately causes of this trend. Each successive circle takes those causes one step further back.

Brainstorming

The next question in Step 2 is, What do women need? To answer this question, we recommend brainstorming.

Brainstorming can be used to develop answers to most questions. Its purpose is to free up the imagination to get out as many ideas as possible. It helps us avoid preconceptions about what solutions might be. It is particularly useful for looking at what it is we want to change because it allows us to raise **anything**. It doesn't matter how impractical or far out it might seem. Later we may decide that it wasn't so impractical or far out after all.

Have a look at the brainstorming illustration, which deals with custody (illustration #8).

When you're ready to begin

- Decide what question you want to ask. Make the question specific to your group. For example, if you were working on the issue of wife assault, you might ask: What do battered women need? If you were working on the cutbacks to women's centre funding, you might ask, What funding do women's centres need to accomplish what we do?
- Once you've got the question, it's time to open up. Members of the group explain their ideas, and you list all those ideas on flip chart paper. This continues until the time for brainstorming is over (you can set a time before you start, or you can decide to brainstorm until each person feels she has said all she wants to).
- Throughout the brainstorming, no one comments on or debates what someone else has said. The idea is to get the ideas down first. Encourage group members to think quickly, to "throw their ideas out."

After the brainstorming list is complete, you can discuss and evaluate the items on the list. You will eliminate some ideas and combine others. When the brainstorming issues are boiled down, you'll have a statement about what women need most.

ILLUSTRATION #8

Brainstorming: Custody law

A support group for women fighting for custody might begin brainstorming this way.

The idea is to get everything out. What would it look like if we got everything we need?

WHAT DO WOMEN FACING CUSTODY FIGHTS NEED?

- *to be believed*
- *to not be forced into mediation*
- *to have their role as primary parent **before** the break-up acknowledged + valued*
- *to have a safe place*
- *to not lose their kids*
- *to have information and advocacy **before** they lose their kids*
- *to be told the truth about how the legal system operates*
- *to change the legal system*
- *to stop men from absconding with their kids*
- *to get as good legal advice as men do—most women can't pay!*
- *to stop men who are abusive + manipulative of their kids*
- *to expose the system—women **aren't** equal in the real world, even if the courts pretend they are!*

Listing our assumptions: wage discrimination

WHAT ARE OUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT WOMEN AND THE WAGE GAP?

1. *Women don't get enough money. Women's economic dependence is a basic part of our society.*

2. *Wages have not historically been legislated in Canada (with a few exceptions such as minimum wage + wage + price controls).*

3. *Men's wages have not historically been determined by value.*

4. *Job evaluation has not worked in the best interests of women in particular and workers in general.*

5. *The business of job evaluation is a very profitable growth industry that takes control away from women.*

A group working on wage discrimination might come up with this final version of its assumptions.

Listing our assumptions: funding for women's centres

WHAT ARE OUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT WOMEN'S CENTRES AND FUNDING?

1. *Women's groups need to be autonomous—i.e. responsible only to the perspectives and needs of women.*

2. *Women's groups need stable, core funding.*

3. *The work of women's centres includes direct service, individual & group advocacy, education, organizing, and lobbying. Therefore, all 3 levels of gov't have a responsibility to fund women's centres.*

4. *The cuts to women's groups are a political move, not just another example of "restraint." They are part of a trend that has been developing since the mid-1980s.*

A group working on the funding cutbacks to women's centres might come up with this final version of its assumptions.

Listing our assumptions

At this point, you're ready to move on to the next question, What are our assumptions? You may wish to continue the brainstorming technique for this or you may wish to move into a slower, more traditional discussion format.

Take a look at the two illustrations about assumptions, #s 9 and 10.

When you're ready to begin

- Ask the group the question, **What are our assumptions about _____?**

  To develop your answer to this question think about what you have already discovered in the first step by asking What's happening to us? and What's affecting our lives? Put the answers to those questions together with what you've found out in this step about Why is this happening?

  This may not be immediately easy, but just start the discussion or the brainstorming session and you'll find that the ideas begin to flow.
- Write down everyone's comments.
- Then begin the process of revision. Some assumptions will turn out to be different ways of saying the same thing, and the group will decide to combine them into one statement. Other assumptions will be discarded, others will be reworked.
- Keep going until you have a list that everyone agrees on.
- Put the final list of assumptions on a new sheet of paper, so that everyone can see clearly what they have agreed to.

  The assumptions will come out of your experience, history, analysis and development of the issue. They are the bottom line statements that keep the work on track.

Articulating goals and objectives

The final question in this step is, What do we want to change? In the long term? In the short term?

This is the last stage in defining the issue. It involves articulating **goals and objectives**.

Goals are general statements of what you are trying to accomplish in the long run. They will be what will really solve the problem for women.

Objectives are specific, concrete statements of what you want to do in the short term in order to move towards your goals.

Goals and objectives can be a bit tricky. Initially you can get a goal mixed up with an objective. So before you begin, review the difference between goals and objectives so that the group is clear about what each means.

While your goals can be broad, your objectives should be specific. For example, an objective may relate to a particular programme your group wants to offer, or a specific change in legislation or government policy, or a new service for women.

We've included some illustrations of goals and objectives, and you might want to take a look at them at this point. (See illustrations #s 11 & 12)

When you have a clear set of goals and objectives you know what you want to accomplish, both in the short term and in the long haul.

ILLUSTRATION #11

Goals and objectives: wage discrimination

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

WHAT DO WE WANT DONE TO GET MORE MONEY FOR WOMEN?

IN THE LONG TERM? (GOALS)

Build an active feminist organization to monitor government and employers actions on issues related to wages.

End wage discrimination, close the wage gap.

IN THE SHORT TERM? (OBJECTIVES)

Increase minimum wage as a method of increasing wages of lowest paid women.

Support alternate collective bargaining methods that most directly delivery $ to women (eg. = base rates, eliminate increments, dollar increases) and meet the needs of low paid women in the union sector.

Develop and implement an alternative legislative model that does not rely on job evaluation.

A group working on wage discrimination might establish these goals and objectives.

ILLUSTRATION #12

Goals and objectives: wife battering

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE IN WORKING WITH AND FOR BATTERED WOMEN?

IN THE LONG TERM? (GOALS)

To build a strong, feminist movement that will:

- *ensure that all battered women get the shelter, support and advocacy they need*
- *wipe out wife battering (and all violence against women and children) and the conditions that make it possible—i.e. patriarchy, misogyny, male violence*

IN THE SHORT TERM? (OBJECTIVES)

To obtain funding for a feminist, multi-ethnic transition house + advocacy centre

To initiate a network of transition houses + other women's groups to figure out how to do more political work on the issue + how to be activists as well as provide a service

To develop and implement a media strategy to talk more bluntly about male violence

A group working on wife battering might establish these goals and objectives.

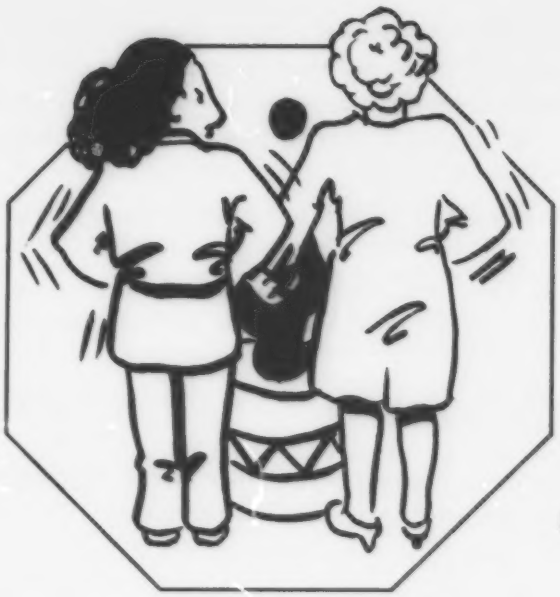
When you're ready to begin

- Begin by writing your question at the top of the chart. You will want to rephrase the general question, What do we want to change? so that it is specific to your issue. For example, if you are working on the issue of wife battering, your question might be, What is our purpose in working with and for battered women?
- Divide the chart in two. In one part write, long term; in the other part write, short term.
- Ask the group to throw out their ideas. There is no particular need to work in the fast brainstorming mode here; go with whatever method your group feels comfortable with.
- Refine and revise the ideas. Keep going until you have goals and objectives everyone feels comfortable with.
- Write the final version of your goals and objectives on a new sheet of paper so that members of the group can see what they have agreed to.

SUMMARY

In this step you have uncovered the causes of the problem and you've decided what is needed to solve the problem . Your group has reached consensus on what your assumptions are about the issue and what it is you aim to change, both in the long term and the short term.

Now you've defined your issue, you're ready for the next step— developing the strategy.



STEP 3

DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

When you know what you want, it's time to look at who is with you, who's against you, what you're going to do, and why you're going to do it.

Who might be with us on this issue?

These are your **allies**.

Who are we up against?

On any issue, there will be people who will oppose you directly. There will also be those whose actions will create problems, even though they may not directly oppose your directly. You need to be ready for both. They are your **opponents**.

What are we going to do?

There are many different ways to work on an issue. You need to be clear about the general approach you are going to take. This is sometimes called the overall **action strategy**.

You also need to know what specific actions can be developed out of this approach. You can call these **tactics**.

Why are we going to do it?

This is a way of **checking** that the strategy you have decided on is the best in terms of what you want to accomplish.

HOW TO DO IT

To answer the questions in this step, we suggest the following exercises:

- **Listing the actors**
- **Pros and cons chart**

Listing the actors

The purpose of this exercise it to identify who might be on your side and who might not. It answers the two questions, Who might be with us on this issue? and **Who are we up against?**

Listing the actors helps you to identify not only your allies and opponents, but also those who may be undecided. This is the group you want to move to the "with us" position.

In order to have a successful strategy, it's essential to understand your starting point with the other actors.

Take a look at the illustrations about listing the actors for the issues of custody and wife battering.

When you're ready to begin

- To list the actors, make three columns: **with us, against us;** and **undecided**. Write everyone you can think of into these three lists.
- Make a note if some groups and individuals are only "with us" on certain short-terms objectives. You can work with them on those objectives, but be prepared for disagreements over the long haul.
- Now identify the most important players in each column. This will give your group some ideas about who you'll want to establish links with, and who will provide the strongest opposition to your strategy.

ILLUSTRATION #13

Listing the actors: custody law

A support group for women fighting for custody might list the actors in this way. The formidable list on the "against us" side might lead this group to emphasize building their base and connecting with potential allies.

WITH US	*UNDECIDED*	*AGAINST US*
▪ *transition houses and other feminist groups working on violence* ▪ *some other feminist groups* ▪ *a few lawyers we know of (list)* ▪ *a few professionals in the system* ▪ *some individuals in the media (give names)*	▪ *women's groups who don't know what's happening* ▪ *some organizations that include men, altho' they may be defensive about issue*	▪ *fathers' rights groups* ▪ *most lawyers* ▪ *judges* ▪ *the "mediation industry"* ▪ *right wing groups* ▪ *some women's groups who think recognizing difference equals discrim. against men* ▪ *most media (more interested in the so-called "new father" than what's happening to women)* ▪ *most people think women are getting a "fairer" deal in court so what are we complaining about*

ILLUSTRATION #14

Listing the actors: wife battering

WITH US	*UNDECIDED*	*AGAINST US*
▪ *other feminist groups working on wife battering & violence (but sometimes restricted by $)* ▪ *some media people/ individual reporters (list...)* ▪ *feminist media* ▪ *some "progressive" gps. that incl. men* ▪ *some politicians (name who)* ▪ *battered women* ▪ *city gov't (on the funding issue ONLY)* ▪ *some (a few) bureaucrats at 3 levels of gov't.*	▪ *women's groups focused only on helping women now* ▪ *some media* ▪ *women's groups who are too overloaded, too busy, no energy to do political work*	▪ *right wing groups* ▪ *male apologists in gov't., media, community groups, churches etc.* ▪ *"macho men"* ▪ *provincial gov't.* ▪ *women's groups afraid of "radicals" who rock the boat*

A group working on wife battering might list the actors and get this result.

The middle column represents the people the group might want to focus on. These are the people who can help tilt the balance in challenging those in the "against us" column.

Pros and cons chart

To answer the next questions, What are we going to do? and Why are we going to do it? we've found no better method than the pros and cons chart.

Have a look at the illustration about the pros and cons of the funding issue.

When you lay out all the reasons for and against each possible action in this systematic fashion you can make choices about what to do. The group will be more committed to the decisions because the reasons are clear.

You will also be able to make decisions more quickly because everyone will have all the information and the arguments won't get repeated as much.

Almost every action has at least the potential of posing some difficulties. The pros and cons chart enables the group to see what the "cons" could be. When you know what the possible "cons" are, you can plan to minimize their effects.

Finally, the chart can give the group a "reserve" of actions in case the first ones are ineffective or unsuccessful.

An issue that is often in the background when choosing action is militancy. Should the group take militant action? Is it effective? When does it isolate the group?

It is important to deal with these questions openly, and the pros and cons chart can help you do this.

There is no one "right" answer to these questions. Sometimes militant actions work, especially in crisis situations or when other actions have been unsuccessful. Sometimes they do isolate a group, especially when the group has not built up enough support.

The point is that those who refuse to consider **any** militant action and those who believe that confrontation is **always** the first step are equally limited in their action choices. That limitation can act like tunnel vision in deciding what the group can do.

Another concern that often lurks in the background is a perceived dichotomy between different kinds of action: providing service vs. political action; lobbying vs. organizing in the community, and so on. Usually the "either/or" position does not reflect reality.

For example, it is very difficult to sustain a service in the absence of political action that reinforces the position that the service is necessary. On the other hand, political action is empty and often misdirected if it is not based on women's experience of the issue—experience that those providing the service are often in the best position to describe.

Similarly, lobbying is almost never effective in the absence of well-organized support in the community.

A group may choose to make certain kinds of action a priority, but should also consider whether those actions will need other kinds of support in order to be effective.

When you're ready to begin

- Write your long-term goals and short-term objectives across the top of the chart. You need to keep them both in mind when you're selecting actions.
- Divide the chart into three columns, with three heads, left to right: Possible actions; Why would we do this?; Why wouldn't we do this?

Pros and cons chart: funding cutbacks to women's centres

A group working on funding cutbacks to women's centres might establish the long-term goal and short-term objective listed in the illustration.

The group would begin the pros and cons chart by listing all the possible actions it might take in order to achieve its goal and objective. After answering the questions, **Why would we do this?** and **Why wouldn't we do this?**, the group can choose its actions.

The group might decide to develop priorities for its actions. For example, group members might decide to do a news conference and attend public events to demand support from their MPs first, while saving a rally or sit-in until they have had the chance to assess their first actions and build support in the community.

Seeing the pros and cons of each action helps the group to minimize the possible negative effects of the action it chooses. After all, no action is entirely without risks!

***LONG TERM GOAL** – permanent location; full-time paid workers; secure funding; all levels of government to take responsibility*

***SHORT TERM OBJECTIVE** – immediate funding by Sec State at levels before cuts; commitment from feds + province to negotiate joint funding*

POSSIBLE ACTIONS	*WHY WOULD WE DO THIS?*	*WHY WOULDN'T WE DO THIS?*
Sit in at Sec State	• *get media attention* • *force gov't to realize we won't take this lying down* • *to encourage other groups to take strong action*	• *will we be isolated?* • *if we don't have enough support⇒probably not what we'd do 1st*
Letter/post card campaign to M.P.'s	• *to show that many people support us* • *way to involve people*	• *don't know how effective it is—probably not effective unless get enough numbers*
Lobbying M.P.	• *so M.P. knows what we think*	• *M.P. won't do anything unless facing public pressure⇒need **public** display of support*
Attend public events to demand support from M.P.	• *to shame her/him into supporting us* • *to let them know we're serious* • *to gain media attention*	• *possibility of losing support if appear disruptive*
Rally in front of Sec State and/or M.P.'s office	• *demonstration of support* • *media attention* • *can build spirits of people participating*	• *if too small, might show lack of support* • *can shift focus away from issue on to "rowdiness"* • *may not get media attention if don't have a "hook"*
Press conference at centre	• *media attention* • *focus on issues* • *it's our own turf—we have control over situation*	• *press may not come if we don't think of a way to attract them*

- In the left-hand column ask members of the group to suggest possible actions. Write them **all** down.
- Go to the other two columns. For each action, answer the questions, Why would we do this? and Why wouldn't we do this?

When the pros and cons chart is complete, you are ready to choose which action to take on. Be realistic: keep in mind the number of women in the group and the time you can commit. You can always add things later, and you might also want to consider which actions could be added later as support grows.

You can also consider how these actions "fit together." You want your action strategy to be made up of individual tactics that are complementary. And before you close, take one last opportunity to measure your chosen action against your goals and objectives.

Pros and cons chart: wage discrimination

A group working on wage discrimination might start their pros and cons chart this way. After looking at the possibilities, group members might choose "Develop an education programme for unions and women's groups" and "Establish a working group to develop alternative models" as their first two actions on the issue.

POSSIBLE ACTIONS	WHY WOULD WE DO THIS?	WHY WOULDN'T WE DO THIS?
Develop an education programme for unions + women's groups, esp. to encourage involvement	• *want to have grassroots support* • *the more people we have, the more we can do* • *to increase awareness of issue + esp. pitfalls of job eval.*	• *if isolated from other actions, could be too inward looking* • *some unions will not be open to input from "outside"*
media campaign to increase awareness	• *to gain public support, increase profile of issue* • *to counter opposition*	• *do we know what we want to say* • *if we don't have momentum or a "hook," media may not pay attention*
Lobby provincial gov't to take action on p.e.	• *gov't is looking for a women's issue to gain support*	• *we don't know what we want in legislation* • *we don't trust this gov't—they will use issue w/o delivering what we need*
Org. a conference on pay equity to discuss strategy	• *to bring together groups concerned w/issue* • *could develop action plan more broadly*	• *conferences more effective to convey info., not discuss strategy* • *may be more useful when we developed issue, possible strategies*
Establish a working group to develop alternate leg. models	• *so we know what we're demanding!* • *so we have a clear alternative to job evaluation*	• *takes a lot of time + energy* • *do we know where we could get resources to do this?*
Organize a social/cultural event on issue	• *raise money for issue* • *build support/solidarity* • *more fun*	• *lack of people willing to organize it* • *effective only if part of bigger strategy*

SUMMARY

You've defined who's with you, who's against you and who's undecided. You've reviewed all the possible actions you might take and considered the pros and cons of each.

On the basis of this information, you have made a decision: you now know what action you want to take.

Before you get down to dividing up the work, finding the resources, and actually doing the action, there's one last thing to do: take step 4—preparing for the results.

STEP 4

PREPARING FOR THE RESULTS

You've decided on your goals and objectives. You know what action you are going to take. But you still have one more step to a complete strategy.

The first component of this step is to **decide in advance how you are going to deal with the response during the action and how you will evaluate the strategy when it's over.**

This step is often left out of group discussions of strategy. That inevitably leads to difficulties later. It can be extremely divisive for the group not to have agreement on how to judge the response and how to assess the work.

Be specific about how and when you plan to evaluate the strategy. This is necessary because the group will need to "wrap up" its strategy as a basis for future planning. You will want to avoid the feeling that things just "fizzled out."

By evaluating the strategy, you can learn valuable lessons about what worked and what didn't. And when you make the work of the group visible, everyone feels better about their role in the strategy—even if all the objectives of the strategy were not achieved.

You complete the exercises we suggest here when your strategy is over. However, you need to plan actively for how you are going to review and assess the strategy. You need to decide now what information you're going to need for that process and how you're going to get it.

What are they telling us?

When women raise an issue there is usually someone, usually one of the opponents, who will tell you what it is that will "solve" your problem. It is important to have a way to compare what s/he is saying with what you know to be true. You can also call this finding a way of assessing **their solution.**

If, on the other hand, your strategy is directed more towards building your base and connecting with your allies, you will focus on determining **community response.**

So the "they" in **What are they telling us?** may change, according to your goals and objectives.

ILLUSTRATION #17

Response chart: wife battering

In this example, a group working on wife battering with a short-term objective of initiating an activist network on the issue wants to assess how other women's groups are responding.

Here the "they" in **What are they telling us?** focuses on community response.

The answers to the two columns on the right, in this case, might indicate the direction that future work should take.

SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVE: *To initiate a network of transition houses and women's groups to do more political work on the issue.*

WHAT ARE THEY TELLING US?	*HOW DOES IT MEET OUR SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES?*	*HOW DOES IT MEET OUR LONG RANGE GOALS?*
Most are saying "we're too busy" *Some are afraid (e.g. of "rocking the boat", funding)* *Some think we can't agree on political position* *A few think it's very important*	• *means we will have to go slower than we had hoped* • *need to do educ. work that shows how the fear + overload are the result of gov't policy and right wing influences and will continue if we don't fight back* • *start by saying clearly what **we** think so we can talk openly about the disagreements we have* • *build from this group, even if small*	*We have to strengthen our own movement, spend more energy than we thought building the base*

ILLUSTRATION #18

Response chart: wage discrimination

A group whose objectives include legislative and policy reform can use the "standards of success" questions to focus discussion on **What are they telling us?** and **How do we know if it's good enough?**

In this illustration, a group working on way discrimination can measure the pay equity "solution" against its own goals and objectives.

LONG TERM GOAL: *End wage discrimination; close the wage gap.*

SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES: *Increase minimum wage; alternative collective bargaining strategies; alternative legislative model*

WHAT ARE THEY TELLING US?	*HOW DO WE KNOW IF IT'S GOOD ENOUGH?*
*That pay equity **requires** job evaluation/comparison of job content to be valid; that pay equity is a good first step for women*	*Standards of success questions:* *Does it deliver?* • *some $ for some women* • *lowest paid excluded* *Implementable?* • *lengthy, cumbersome process* *Understandable?* • *No! – control w/consultants* *Can we mobilize around it?* • *yes in short term, harder later* *Monitorable?* • *no – too complicated* *– doesn't promise particular result* *Entrenched* • *no – one-shot deal* *Does it avoid limiting future advances?* • *no*

How do we know if it's good enough?

The group needs to know if what you may be offered is a good enough step towards both your short-term objectives and your long-term goals. You don't want to be trapped into supporting a solution that has little practical effect.

You need to affirm the basic points that must be included in legislative or policy change. You can call these your **standards of success**. And if it's a community response you're looking for, you need to know how you will **review community response**.

How can we keep track of the results?

This is a question which can easily be overlooked. But without a plan for **monitoring** the aftermath of your strategy, many victories can be hollow ones. You won't know, for example, if a reform really worked, or if it just looked good.

How can we assess our strategy?

Regardless of the response the group gets, you will want to review your strategy, decide in what ways it has and has not been successful, and take those lessons into your future actions. This is called **evaluation** of the strategy.

HOW TO DO IT

To answer the questions in this step, you might wish to use these exercises:

- **Response chart**
- **Monitoring the information**
- **Key word evaluation**

We've included two illustrations of each exercise, which you might like to take a look at now.

Response chart

A response chart helps you assess the response to your strategy. It deals with the questions, **What are they telling us?** and **How do we know if it's good enough.**

When you're ready to begin

We've included two kinds of response charts.

The **first version** of the response chart checks out the question, **What are they telling us?** against the group's short term objectives and long-term goals. (See illustration #17.)

- Write the short-term objective across the top of the flip chart.
- Beneath that, divide the sheet into three columns: the first has the question, What are they telling us?; the second asks, How does it meet our short-term objectives; and the third asks, How does it meet our long-range goals?

The **second version** of the response chart is a bit more elaborate. It is designed to focus more closely on the second question, **How do we know if it's good enough?** (See illustration #18)

To get at this issue, we've developed a series of questions which set up a **standard of success**. A standard of success is simply seven questions you can ask. They are:

Δ Does it deliver a significant gain for women?

Δ It is implementable? How easily? How quickly?

Δ Is it understandable?

Δ Is it something we can mobilize around? In the long term? In the short term?

Δ Is it monitorable? Will we have the information we need?

Δ Is it entrenched?

Δ Does it avoid limiting future advance towards our long-term goal?

These questions won't fit every issue exactly. Before you start the exercise, you can modify them to suit.

- Write the long-term goal and the short-term objective across the top of the flip chart sheet.

  Then divide the sheet into two columns. On one side write, What are they telling us? On the other, write, How do we know if it's good enough?

  In the second column include your seven **standard of success** questions, leaving space for response. (You might need to go to a second sheet of paper.)

Monitoring the information

This exercise helps you keep an eye on the results. When you know what's going on, it's more difficult for the opposition to say the issue has disappeared! When you prepare ahead for the response, monitoring may become one of your demands.

To monitor the information, you prepare a list of the details you need to know, and decide when and how you are going to get them. Monitoring the information answers the question, How can we keep track of the results?

When you're ready to begin

Write the following heads across a wide piece of flip chart:
Gains; results; when; how; who to check with?

- Divide the chart into five columns, one for each head.
- In the "gains" column, list your achievements.
- In the "results" column, list what your achievements should mean. Who will benefit?
- The "when" column allows you to set a timeline for when the expected benefits should be in place. This gives you an idea of when to come back to assess the progress of issue.
- In the "how" column you can describe how you're going to check the results.
- In the "who to check with" column you can list names, positions, etc. of people you might want to contact in order to assess the results.
- At the end of this discussion, *type up* what's on the flip chart and *set a meeting date* to look at what's happened. The meeting date will, of course, relate to what you've put in the "when" column. At that meeting you can decide which group members will be responsible for implementing the "how" column suggestions and for making the appropriate contacts.

Key word evaluation: funding cutbacks to women's centres

A group evaluating its strategy to fight the funding cutbacks to women's centres might use key word evaluation to come up with these results.

- APPROPRIATE?

  YES — because existence of some women's groups at stake, and because we've seen in the past that if we don't react strongly to cuts, we are cut back even more at the next opportunity

- EFFECTIVE?

  YES — the government was forced to respond, offer money

- EFFICIENT?

  YES — locally, a lot of women with experience + skills worked together to take responsibility

  — we were well connected to other groups regionally + nationally—THIS WAS KEY!

- SIDE EFFECTS?

  Positive — developed working connections between groups

  — stronger, more militant women's movement

  — stronger sense of connection across country

  Negative — highlighted a significant division between some women—we don't have a way of dealing with political differences

Key word evaluation

In order to answer the final question, **How can we assess our strategy?** you might want to use **key word evaluation**.

Key word evaluation provides a basic framework for evaluation. You review the four key words listed below:

1. Appropriate?

Was it right for us to do this? Was it appropriate to our organization's purpose? Was it appropriate for anyone to use at all?

2. Effective?
How successful was this strategy in meeting our stated objectives?

3. Efficient?
How costly was the strategy compared to the benefits we received? Were the benefits worth the energy, time, money and other resources we used? Did we get the money for our energy/time/money etc?

4. Side effects?
What good and bad side effects occurred as a result of this strategy?

When you're ready to begin

- Write the first key word on a flip chart, and ask the group to answer the questions. Cover each key word in turn, writing the responses on the chart.

You can use key word evaluation to focus on different parts of your work. For example, if your group is working on education as well advocacy, you might want to write the name of each activity at the top of the page. (See illustration #20.) Then write the key words on the far left-hand side of the page (it's easier to write them vertically) and record the group's responses to each part of the work. This enables you to see the big picture.

CONCLUSION

Now you're ready to put your strategy into action. You can use the **Strategy Checklist** to record the results of your planning. It will help you keep on track.

Good luck!

ILLUSTRATION #7

Key word evaluation: wage discrimination

A group working on wage discrimination might come to these conclusions when group members evaluated their two main actions: an education programme for unions and women's groups; and a working group of alternative legislative strategies.

The evaluation points out some directions for future work, and highlights the importance of doing evaluation.

	EDUCATION PLAN FOR UNIONS & WOMEN'S GROUPS	WORKING GROUP ON ALTERNATE LEGISLATIVE MODELS
APPROPRIATE?	Partly — but difficult to do effective education when many unions are resistant to working with us and women's groups say they are too busy ⟹ need to think thru more clearly who will be most receptive and how to reach those who aren't	Yes — the working group on alternatives is essential not to lose control of the issue
EFFECTIVE?	Partly — we didn't have a good enough overview of how the pieces of the strategy fit together — too fragmented	
	Some unions and women's groups have been open to working with us	We have made some advances in working on an alternative model
EFFICIENT?	No — we should have first worked on getting more support from unions and women's groups rather than trying to "lay on" an education plan	No — we spent a lot of time discussing models but didn't have the resources ($, time, expertise) to complete the job
SIDE EFFECTS?	POSITIVE — we made some new contacts and have a better idea of who is most open to working with us	
	NEGATIVE — we burnt out some volunteers	

• THE STRATEGY CHECKLIST •

You can use this worksheet to record your strategy discussion, and to summarize the key decisions. Each member of the group should have a copy. It will be useful in keeping your strategy on track.

1. Beginning from our experience: grounding the issue

What's happening to us?

What's affecting our lives?

Who are we? Who's not here?

How did we get here?

2. Developing the issue

Why is this happening?

What do women need?

What are our assumptions?

What do we want to change?
What is our long-term goal?

What is our short-term objective?

3. Developing the strategy

Who are our allies on this issue?

Who are our opponents?

What strategy are we going to use?

Why are we going to do it?

4. Preparing for the results

What are they telling us?

_____

_____

_____

How do we know if it's good enough?

_____

_____

_____

How can we assess our strategy?

_____

_____

_____

• STRATEGY SUMMARY •

The issue: _____

_____

_____

Long-term goal: _____

_____

_____

Short-term objective: _____

_____

_____

Action strategy: _____

_____

_____

Evaluation strategy: _____

_____

_____

GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATORS

To facilitate is to make something easier, to help a process go forward. You don't have to be an expert, your job is simply to ask questions, get people involved, and keep them focused.

The information in the guidelines is designed to help you prepare for and facilitate a "Strategies for Change" workshop.

Whether you are a facilitator from outside the group or from within it, this information is important to review before doing a workshop.

Although the *Strategies for Change* workbook is based on the experience of women's groups, the process is applicable to a range of groups and issues.

Information in these guidelines is divided into six sections:

I **Working Principles of *Strategies for Change***
II **Planning for the Workshop**
III **Preparing Yourself for Facilitation**
IV **Logistics of the Workshop**
V **Group Dynamics**
VI **Group Process and Decision Making**

I
WORKING PRINCIPLES OF STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

The *Strategies for Change* workbook uses the principles of "popular education" — a learning process developed by Brazilian educator, Paulo Friere. This method starts with people's experience. It follows a few basic beliefs:

- People know what they need.
- By posing questions, people can uncover the roots of their problems and develop an awareness of the larger picture.
- Awareness becomes a basis for action. By developing a strategy collectively people can direct their own solutions.
- Reflection and evaluation follow action.

The facilitator's role in this process is to act as a guide, to help organize the participants' information through the steps outlined in Part Two of the workbook:

Step 1:
Grounding the issue — define the issue in terms of women's experience, not in the terms of government, the media, or "experts."

Step 2:
Defining the issue — begin to develop the issue based on the knowledge gained in step 1.

Step 3:
Develop the strategy — what you're going to do, and why you're going to do it.

Step 4:
Preparing for the results — decide in advance how you are going to deal with the response during the action and how you will evaluate the strategy when it's over.

The process is most importantly a dialogue. It validates peoples reality and strengthens their own resources.

Your job is to ask open-ended questions, to guide the group in exploring the issues, to help clarify and consolidate ideas, to maintain the focus, and to encourage participation.

Don't panic if you're not an expert on the topic the group is working on. The facilitator's role in this process is not to know the answers or tell people how to do things. People know their concerns and their experience. If neither you nor the other participants have particular information, it becomes a research task for the group.

One goal of the workshop is to help groups become comfortable using questioning and analyzing as tools for change. It is a building process: information and ideas from the group

reinforce and support each other, building toward a realistic and manageable strategy to effect change.

II
PLANNING FOR THE WORKSHOP

1. Get as much information from the group ahead of time as possible; all of it is helpful in planning. Answers to the following questions are especially useful:
   - what does the group hope to accomplish?
   - what issues are they dealing with and want to work on?
   - how long have they been working together? are they an established group or just formed?
   - how many people will participate?
   - are there any special needs?

   Material the group has written about itself, or projects on which they are currently working, can also be helpful. Even if you are a member of the group you will be facilitating for, it is important to review these questions.

2. You may wish to set a limit on the number of participants. Groups over 20 are usually unwieldy, allow for less participation, and require more time to involve everyone.

   Factors to take into account in deciding numbers might include your experience, available time, and the purpose of the workshop. Participants are generally group members who will be carrying out the actions. If you include anyone else, be sure your reasons for doing so are clear. Make sure that the person's participation and input will further the goal of the workshop and any actions to be carried out.

3. It is important to explain the four-step process, the length of time involved, and the necessity that the group complete **all** the steps. Many groups have a hard time agreeing to two full days or four three-hour time blocks, and you'll have to adapt the steps accordingly. Step 4, Preparing for the Results, is often the one to get shortened. If you do this, make sure the group understands the importance of doing the evaluation planning on their own and give them the basics.

4. As the group will likely be arranging the space, let them know any requirements you have; for example, wall space to hang papers, a flip chart stand, room to move around, no tables.

III
PREPARING YOURSELF FOR FACILITATION

1. The facilitator may be a person from outside or within the group. If you are a group member acting as facilitator, it is important for you to suspend your involvement with the group enough to guide rather than direct the process. In order for the process to remain open, try to rid yourself of any preconceptions about the outcome.

2. If two of you are planning the facilitation, decide how to divide the work, plan how to assist each other, and discuss any concerns or expectations either of you have. Work out how much time each section should take, the type of questions you think are important, and how you plan to handle any anticipated difficulties.

3. The workbook suggests a place to start for each section. However, realize that the questions in the workbook were developed to apply to a broad range of issues and groups. You will probably have to adapt them to the group's own needs and focus. You must develop questions as you go to help people bring forward their knowledge, expand and clarify their ideas, and deepen their understanding of the issue. Think this out in advance using the information you receive from the group.

   Questioning is a discovery process for the facilitator and participants, and it is the root of the popular education model. Questioning arises from the discussion and you will get

more comfortable with it with practice. Keep your goals in mind when you decide the direction of your questioning and keep questions open-ended and non-judgmental. (How, what, when, and where questions are a better place to start than why questions.)

4. Allow about three hours for each of the four steps and develop a specific time frame. For example:

STEP 1:

9:00 – 9:20 a.m.	Introductions
9:20 – 10:45	Drawing our experience
10:45 – 11:00	Break
11:00 – 11:30	Who we are, Who's here, Who's not
11:30 – 12:00	Historical time line

5. Remember time is often a problem for groups. You may have to adjust the time for each step. Which steps you shorten depends on the group's needs and stage of development. For example, the historical timeline can be used one of two ways: to look at the history of the group and their work on the issue, or to look at the work that has been done around the issue by other groups. The historical timeline can be done more quickly if the group looks only at their own history. Depending on the group's issue, this may be all they need.

6. Participation is the key to this process. One way to bring people into the process is to encourage their participation in the drawing exercise in step one. If people express reluctance or discomfort with drawing you can stress that the drawing exercise is not for artistic value. It may be helpful to encourage participants to use symbols and diagrams that they are comfortable and familiar with.

7. At the end of Step 3, after the actions have been determined, it is well worth the time to draw up a work plan.

   To do a workplan, have the group priorize the first three or four actions they want to work on. On a flip chart draw four columns with the headings **action, specifics, who,** and **when.** Take each action in turn; under "specifics," have the group list the particulars of how they will carry out the action, then decide who will do each part, and when they will complete the task. This offers a model for future use, and leaves the group with some immediate and concrete plans.

8. Remember, the charts and diagrams in the workbook are models of layout and organization. When you are facilitating, don't worry if your's are not as organized or as neat and tidy.

IV
LOGISTICS OF THE WORKSHOP

1. Make sure you have felt pens, flip charts, masking tape, and a large roll of paper. Try table cloth paper for large drawings — it's heavier than newsprint and won't leak ink onto the wall.

2. Take along any pertinent resource material for reference or hand-outs.

3. Arrange seating so everyone can see each other. A circle is ideal for this.

4. Make general agreements with the group at the beginning about details such as breaks, timeframe, and smoking. Your aim is to make sure everyone is comfortable and able to be attentive.

5. Introduce yourself and the group members. If everyone in the group knows each other, you will need an exercise to help you get to know them too. For example, you could ask each person their name and one thing pertinent to their role in the group. Or you could ask them their name and something they don't think other group members know about them. This might turn out to be quite silly, but laughter is a great way to start.

   When people are in the early stages of starting a group and don't know each other well, introductions are a way of building trust and creating a good base for the work ahead, so it's

worth spending some time here. You can be as creative as you dare in dreaming up ways for people to get to know each other. It can be as straightforward as having people pair up (with whoever they know least), learn something about each other, and introduce each other to the group. Or you can have people use drawings to introduce themselves — a self-portrait, or the five most important things in their life, etc. Group games can also be an entertaining and effective method of getting acquainted and getting energized, too.

6. Give the group a general overview of the process and the time frame you're suggesting. It helps everyone keep on track. Times may need adjustment to meet the group's particular needs or to address specific, unforeseen issues that emerge, so stay flexible. Keep the overall goals in mind if you reorganize your plans.

7. Write people's ideas on flip charts or other large paper as you go. Keep them all visible, if you can, by taping them up around the room. The four steps build on each other so it is useful to be able to refer to the work and discussion that has gone on before.

8. You may need to consolidate or reorganize notes for clarity after an exercise is completed. Rewrite the flip charts during a break so the ideas are clear and concise for easy reference.

9. There is a lot of writing and drawing in this process. Group members might enjoy doing some of it. When recording, try to use people's own words as much as possible. If ideas are long or unclear, ask for help in clarifying or rewording. If you do rephrase something, ask, "is it accurate if I write...," "have I understood you correctly...," etc.

10. Watch for fatigue. Take a couple of minutes to play a game or do an exercise if people get restless between breaks. If the group hits an impasse or runs into a particularly complex issue, breaking into small groups can help generate new ideas and energy.

11. Keep track of time and keep the group informed: "We have 15 minutes to wrap this up," "there are 30 minutes left and we have these three things to cover," etc.

12. Have the group keep the flip charts for future reference. They may want to type up certain sections for easy reference.

V
GROUP DYNAMICS

Understanding and facilitating how groups function is a skill that develops with experience and training, however, just paying attention and watching patterns of interaction can take you a long way. Some simple agreements with the group help everyone keep common goals in sight.

1. **Shared participation**
   The popular education model recognizes that we all have knowledge and skills to offer. The model is based on listening to and respecting others and working co-operatively. Ask the group to help make sure everyone has opportunities to participate. Silent members may need to be encouraged — "do those who haven't spoken have something to add?" Dominating members may need to be reminded to make sure everyone has a chance to speak, or even to speak briefly or less often. If a group has particular difficulty with this, "rounds" (going around the circle, giving everyone a turn to speak) might be useful.

2. **Shared responsibility**
   Ask people to help by listening carefully, by staying on topic, and by avoiding too much talking, interrupting, or chatting with neighbours. The job of group members is to empower others and themselves to speak honestly, to be willing to listen to others, and to see their own view as one of many.

3. **Internal group or personal conflicts**
   Sometimes, conflicts that affect the group emerge while the group is looking at their

needs. Usually, a weekend workshop is not the place to solve a long-standing problem. However, the conflict can be clarified and identified as one of the issues to be resolved. As with other issues, actions can then be developed to address the problem.

Encourage people to look for common ground or points of similarity when disagreements arise. However, do not be afraid of disagreement — differences can be a constructive starting point for alternative solutions.

4. **Group process and development**
   Groups in the early stages of formation may discover that one of their primary objectives is to establish a cohesive and effective organization. It may be important to allot time to discuss this objective in some detail. Topics to guide the discussion might include:
   - decision making
   - membership and relationship between staff, boards, volunteers and committees
   - process skills (facilitation, group agreements and task sharing)
   - grounding assumptions
   - resources the group needs

VI

GROUP PROCESS AND DECISION MAKING

In the course of a workshop, a group may wish to consider how it operates and what values they want to hold as a group. This can be useful information for a newly-formed group or for an established group wishing to review or alter their group process. Some issues that are important include the following.

1. **Decision making**
   This is fundamental to the structure and process of the group. Are decisions to be made by consensus or by majority vote? The choice has implications for the way people participate, settle disagreements, share information, and deal with power. If the choice is consensus, make sure everyone has the same understanding of what that means.

2. **Membership**
   Be clear who the membership is, and whether there are any limits or restrictions to membership. If the group is structured with different functions (e.g., staff, board, volunteers), make sure the lines of decision making, responsibility, and communication are clear.

3. **Process skills**
   Group members may need to learn how to work effectively together. Even with good will there are many pitfalls. Two important guides: keep your sense of humour and be tolerant! Other things to consider:

   Facilitation: This function helps the group stay on track. Can you rotate this job each meeting? Suggestions for successful facilitating include —
   - set an agenda
   - keep the group to an agreed time frame
   - clarify and summarize
   - encourage people to stay on topic
   - maintain an atmosphere where everyone has a chance to participate

   Note taking: The facilitator or a recorder can do this on flip charts as you go. You may want someone taking minutes as well or instead. Keep track of tasks and when they are to be completed.

   Group agreements: Members can share responsibility for the effective functioning of the group. Everyone can help keep things on track and make sure they don't dominate or monopolize the discussion. Watch for shared participation, avoid interrupting, and create a comfortable atmosphere. Make agreements about breaks, smoking, length, time, and place of meetings.

   Tasks: Don't forget to rotate tasks so no one gets "stuck" with difficult or undesirable jobs. Be sure to determine a time frame in which to get tasks done. Sharing jobs is a good idea that

avoids isolation and encourages skill-sharing and support. Be sure tasks are clearly outlined and accountability to the group is defined.

Fun: Make sure there is time to recognize your accomplishments, to appreciate each other, and to do something enjoyable together.

4. **Grounding assumptions**
   These are the reasons the group was formed. They may include your goals and objectives but they are also a statement of the group's common values and political agreements. Step 2 in the workbook addresses this. Having these statements of agreement are a valuable reminder to keep perspective when the group has a heavy workload and is responding to outside demands.

5. **Resources for the group**
   As a group you'll be putting out a lot of information and energy. What do you need for yourselves? Are there information sessions or workshops that could assist your work and give you new energy? Don't forget about personal stress and the need for a rest in a long campaign. Are there resources within or outside the group to assist in noticing, identifying, and coping with personal needs?

FURTHER RESOURCES

THE STORY OF THREE ISSUES

For additional information and analysis on these three issues, we recommend the following:

On wage discrimination and pay equity:

Debra J. Lewis, *Just Give Us the Money: a discussion of wage discrimination and pay equity.* Vancouver: Women's Research Centre, 1988. 136 pages.

On wife assault:

Jan Barnsley, *Feminist Action, Institutional Reaction: Responses to Wife Assault.* Vancouver: Women's Research Centre, 1985. 102 pages.

Susan Schechter, *Women and Male Violence: The Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women's Movement.* Boston: South End Press, 1982. 367 pages.

On custody laws:

Susan Crean, *In the Name of the Fathers: The Story Behind Child Custody.* Toronto: Amanita Enterprises, 1988. 185 pages.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

The following are some of the sources we consulted in developing the framework and exercises included in "Four Steps to A Strategy for Change."

Canadian Council for International Co-operation, *SP...I Love You: An Introduction to Strategic Planning for Canadian Practitioners of Development Education.* Ottawa: CCIC, 1989. 19 pages.

Deborah Barndt with Carlos Freire, Illustrator, *Naming the Moment: Political Analysis for Action.* Toronto: Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, 1989. 90 pages.

Virginia Coover, Ellen Deacon, Charles Esser and Christopher Moore, *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution: A Handbook of Skills and Tools for Social Change Activists.* Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1977, 1985. 330 pages.

GATT-Fly, *Ah-hah! A New Approach to Popular Education.* Toronto: Between the Lines, 1983. 109 pages.

Women's Health Education Project of Newfoundland and Labrador, *Women's Resource Kit.* St. John's: Women's Health Education Project, 1984. 112 pages.

Of Interest To Facilitators

Paulo Freire, *Pedogogy of the Oppressed.* New York: The Seabury Press, 1970. 186 pages.

The Centre for Conflict Resolution, *A Manual for Group Facilitators.* Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1978. 90 pages.

The Women's Self-Help Network, Working Together for Change, *Women's Self-help Handbook, Vol 1 & Vol 2.* Campbell River, B.C.: Ptarmigain Press, 1984. 323 pages.

Of Related Interest From The Women's Research Centre

Jan Barnsley and Diana Ellis, *Action Research for Women's Groups.* Vancouver: Women's Research Centre, 1987. Kit.

Jan Barnsley, Diana Ellis and Helga Jacobson, *An Evaluation Guide for Women's Groups.* Vancouver: Women's Research Centre, 1986. 72 pages.

The Women's Research Centre is a community-based, feminist organization focused on research that makes visible women's experience and facilitates action on women's issues. We have published guides on action research, strategy development and evaluation methods. We have conducted research and produced publications on violence against women, and on economic issues, including pay equity. We also assist groups in developing their own projects.

Contact the Centre for a complete list of our publications.

We are a non-profit, charitable organization funded by government grants, contracts, and donations. (Tax receipts will be issued on request.)

We would appreciate receiving feedback from the readers of *Strategies for Change*. Please send us your comments on the book. How was it useful? How can it be improved? What further work in this area would be useful to you?

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